

Community Participation in Systemic Restructuring: Member-Selection Procedures

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Context and Rationale

Experts on school-based restructuring claim that community involvement is necessary for effective, long-standing innovation (Banathy, 1991; Havelock, 1973; Havelock and Zlotolow, in press, 1994). While this is appealing, we know little about the nature of this involvement or preferred methods and procedures for drawing community members into increased levels of participation.

Much has been written to guide school change efforts, but recent emphasis on shared decision-making teams which involve community members lacks specific guidelines for selecting members. When educational planners invite community members into the restructuring process, they invite various competing agendas, educational and social values, and work styles. This diversity, while a source of innovation and energy, presents a challenge for educational planners. How participation will be handled can determine the success or failure of the effort (Havelock, 1973; Havelock and Zlotolow, in press, 1994). A key aspect of this process is the determination of exactly who will be involved.

Overview

In this article, we offer guidelines for selecting community members for systemic restructuring efforts in public schools. A careful examination of what we mean by the terms "community" and "systemic restructuring" is followed by precursors which should be considered prior to beginning

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selection efforts. A justification for the importance of selection efforts is presented prior to an overview of selection guidelines. Finally, each of the steps in the community selection model is described in greater detail.

Defining Community

Who is included in the school community? Warren (1978) offers a classic social science definition of the term community as, "a social unit which consists of persons who share a common geographic area interacting in terms of a common culture and which incorporates a range of social structures which function to meet a relatively broad range of needs of all persons who make up the social unit" (p. 2). Therefore, a community cannot be defined solely by the physical region it occupies, nor can it be limited to individuals in the community with a compelling interest in the school.

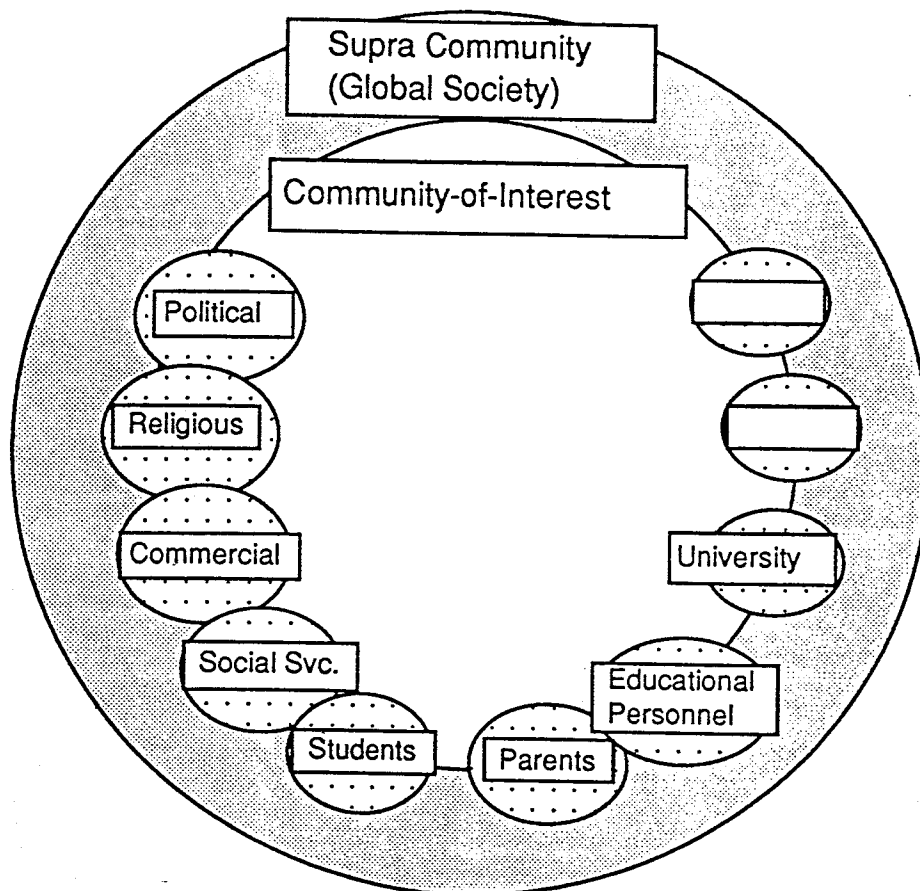
Warren (1978) provides another conceptualization of the term community as, "an arena or field of interaction manifesting certain systemic tendencies" (p. 409). Wagstaff and Galagher (1990) offer this reflection on such a perspective, "From this angle, community transcends time and space. It is a condition where people come together over values, needs, and demands" (p. 98). These definitions are appropriate because they account for the complexities inherent in social systems.

Therefore, it is useful to consider the community as a system. A school community combines people, institutions, regions, and processes which create a whole that goes beyond the contribution of any single component in the system. There is a synergy in the community. The concept of community as system encourages a global view of the community and forces consideration of all stakeholder groups, interactions among components, and effects of changes on the entire system.

We can say that every community has a supra-community of which it is a part and several sub-communities which are parts of it. Figure 1 represents the community as a system. In the case of Figure 1, there may be intervening systems which lie between the supra-community (here identified as the global society) and the community-of-interest (in this case the school system community). For example, there are national, regional, and local communities that exist separately from the school system and may lie between the global and school communities. Figure 1 also indicates that sub-communities may lie both inside and outside of the community-of-interest.

Groups that can be considered stakeholders (Reigeluth, in press) include political, religious, and

Figure 1
Community as System



commercial leaders, social service and educational personnel, as well as student and parental populations. Each of these sub-communities has its own members, social norms, and status in both the supra-community and the community-of-interest. Several blank sub-systems are shown in Figure 1 because we cannot identify here all stakeholders for a given community.

The visual representation of the systems in Figure 1 is purposeful. The community-of-interest has a boundary which separates it from the supra-community and any intervening communities. However, this system is an open system which exchanges materials, resources, and information with the larger global community and intervening communities. The sub-communities lie in both the community-of-interest and the supra-community. Stakeholders have one set of interests, expecta-

tations, and opinions of the community-of-interest, while they may hold separate interests, expectations, and opinions in the supra-community and maintain membership in the sub-community. Communities may overlap as indicated in the figure. Members of sub-communities may belong to more than one sub-community or even many of them.

Systemic Restructuring

We use systemic restructuring and Educational Systems Design (ESD) interchangeably. ESD seeks to create new images and divisions of educational systems which exist beyond the current paradigm or system of schooling. Banathy (1992) distinguishes between restructuring and systems design efforts, indicating that true systems design extends beyond the existing system to create something

new, whereas re-structuring, re-form, re-suscitating, or re-surrecting a failing educational system remains, according to Banathy, *within the already established system*. At the other extreme, the term restructuring has been colloquialized to mean almost anything which previously was considered a reform effort. Since many practitioners are not familiar with the term ESD, and *are* familiar with the term restructuring, we use the term *systemic restructuring* to denote *the kind of restructuring that creates a new paradigm or system of education*.

While selection guidelines for community participants are useful regardless of the school effort (reform, systemic restructuring, etc.), the importance of *effective* community participation in systemic restructuring is particularly crucial. Both Reigeluth (in press) and Banathy (1991) express deep concern over the state of community "buy-in" at the outset of design efforts. Banathy (1991) emphasizes the importance of community support, saying it must be "generated by inviting and encouraging a genuine involvement of representatives of the community in the design activity" (p. 168). Such a posture demands a balanced, committed team of individuals willing to exercise power and take responsibility for the education of their community's youth.

Precursors to Selecting Team Members

If certain conditions are not met prior to beginning a change effort, the success of such an effort is at stake. Three steps which should precede selection efforts include: (1) assess the readiness of the community; (2) select an outside facilitator; and (3) obtain commitments from stakeholder groups (Reigeluth, in press).

One of the key elements of community readiness (precursor #1) is a high level of *dissatisfaction* with the current system of education (Reigeluth, in press). This may seem averse to school personnel, who are accustomed to promoting a positive public image of the school. However, communities which display high levels of dissatisfaction are more willing to invest the necessary time and are more likely to be open to radical changes. Without community dissatisfaction, change efforts are likely to be piecemeal and short-lived.

Although the school corporation or district may appear committed to the restructuring process, it is imperative that readiness for restructuring be closely scrutinized. The selection of team members should only be considered *after* sufficient readiness has been confirmed. In order for a systemic effort to have a chance of success, it is necessary to lay a strong foundation of grass-roots support for

fundamental change.

The second precursor to selection efforts is to choose an outside facilitator. This may not be necessary in all cases, but is highly suggested, as an outside facilitator brings objectivity and expertise in educational change processes to the task of systemic restructuring.

The third precursor to selection efforts is to obtain commitments from stakeholder groups. This is important because, if you begin selection prior to gaining commitment in formal settings such as the local Chamber of Commerce, you run the risk of powerful stakeholders perceiving that they have been "cut out" of the process.

Why Is Selection So Pivotal?

As we have seen from the precursor-discussion, selecting team members can be a delicate political process, as well as a search for excellent volunteers. As the first formal and visible step in an educational change process, selection will set the tone for future work on the project. As the design process progresses, ignored or unrepresented stakeholders can block or even sabotage design efforts.

Havelock (1973) presents several case studies which support the importance of early inclusion of community stakeholders in change initiatives. One case study outlines the development of a sex education curriculum for K-12 in which the community, which was not consulted publicly early in the process, blocked the program:

... we should have been forewarned by the experiences with community antagonism which had been related to us by school personnel in districts which had established similar programs At one meeting questions were raised about how we were going to teach Judeo-Christian ethics. Our spokesman stated that, 'We can't teach morals,' and BOOM! the lid flew off. (p. 29)

The rest of the case is an account of sabotage efforts undertaken by an extremist group which planted doubt in the minds of the citizenry and drew negative media attention to the sex education curriculum. Carefully selected community representatives on the curriculum design team would have been helpful in overcoming such political roadblocks.

The importance of who will be involved should not be underemphasized, even in teams invested with varying levels of power. Recent reform efforts have focused on the inclusion of community participants in roles ranging from advisory to decision-making capacities. Regardless of level of power, it is important that time be taken to ensure that the highest caliber participants engage in

public school change efforts. While some administrators may feel that lengthy selection processes detract from the "business at hand," and may be tempted (particularly where advisory boards are concerned) to shortcut selection recommendations, it is important to recognize that team efforts can be jeopardized by insufficient inclusion of stakeholder groups.

A recent experience in a large urban school district may serve to illustrate this point. Advisory boards involving parents and community members were created with little or no direct power over the affairs of their local school. After one year of meeting as advisory boards, the community members were clamoring for, and received, increased legitimacy and power. Therefore, selection should be viewed as an opportunity to gather the best volunteers the community has to offer, given that what starts out as an advisory board may evolve into a more powerful decision-making team.

In summary, whenever an invitation is issued to involve community members in one's public schools, care should be taken to ensure that a balanced, informed, committed group of volunteers is chosen. If such care is not exercised, stakeholder groups may rise up to challenge or sabotage the change effort.

The Two-Team Approach to Change

Reigeluth (in press) identifies two primary groups for designing educational systems: a coordinating council and a design team. The coordinating council, or advisory board, serves a primarily political role, while the design team serves a more central role in the actual design of an alternative educational system. There are thus two major functions for team members: (1) advisory board members garner support for already-made decisions, and (2) design team members are responsible for actively participating in a decision-making role.

In drawing support for restructuring decisions, the advisory board member is asked to concur with broad goals and provide political cover and financial resources for often controversial decisions. In actual decision-making, design team members are involved before solutions are determined, and even before problems are clearly defined. Here, the community member takes responsibility for problems and solutions, and educators must respect and value the opinions of this lay person. In educational change efforts, these two roles can be serial or parallel, temporary or permanent. However, the roles are distinct, requiring different skills and personnel and calling for different *selection criteria*. The *procedures* for selecting these two teams, however, may be the same.

Overview of a Community Selection Model

A cautionary note is merited here. We recognize that each community has varying environmental conditions under which community member selection takes place, and the procedures and criteria must, by necessity, be flexible enough to accommodate different types of communities and populations. The model presented here is a set of guidelines that are *meant to be altered* to fit the needs of practitioners in the field.

1. Identify stakeholder groups.
2. Decide to form a selection delegation.
3. Hold town meetings:
 - A. Identify candidates for selection delegation.
 - B. Identify candidates for design team and advisory board.
4. Select delegates.
5. Hold Delegation Meeting #1: Orientation.
 - A. Review the criteria for selection and procedures.
 - B. Review design team and advisory board purposes.
 - C. Review selection delegation task.
6. Hold Delegation Meeting #2: Candidate Overview.
 - A. Present candidate profiles to delegation (without discussion).
7. Hold Additional Delegation Meeting(s).
 - A. Discuss candidates based on criteria.
 - B. Divide candidates into two groups, "yes" and "no." OR Create a "short list." OR Use a combination approach.
 - C. Create a draft slate as a growing whole.
 - D. Review/revise final slate.
 - E. Vote on final slate.
8. Confirm commitment of members on final slate.
9. Hold a "Coming Out" event.
10. Ensure self-renewal of teams.

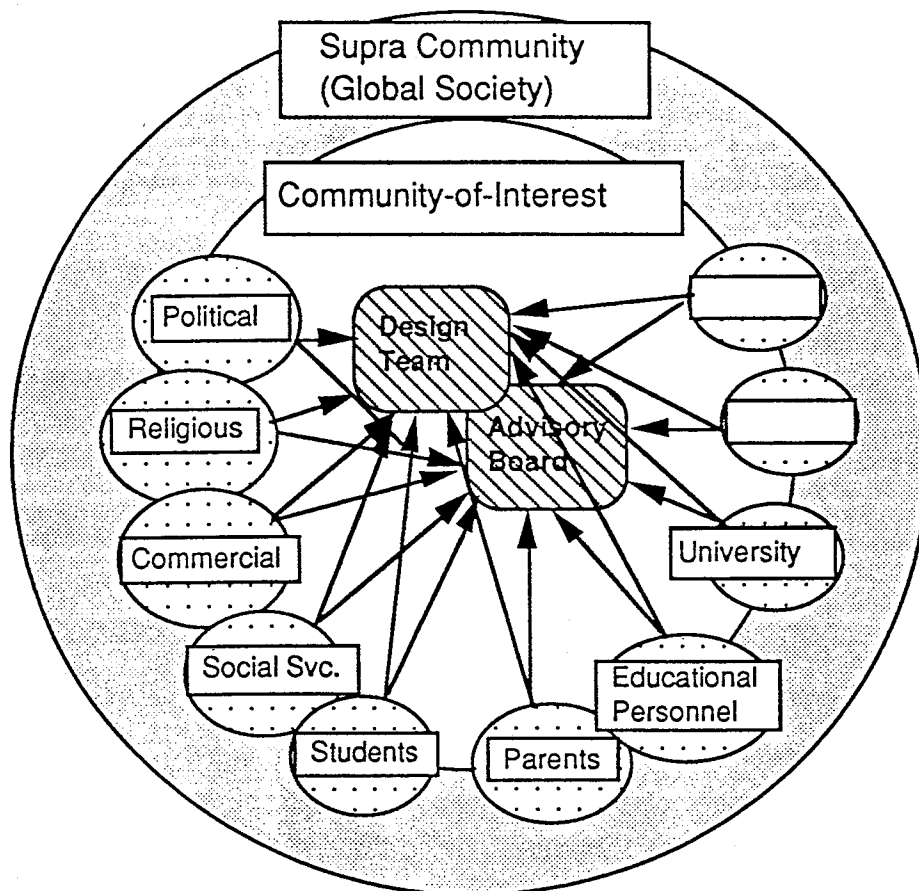
The Community Selection Model

1. Identify Stakeholder Groups

Within a school community, there are sub-communities or stakeholder groups which are affected by the educational system. Each stakeholder group should have some influence on the design and advisory teams. As a result, we can say that generally, team members should be chosen from these stakeholder groups (see Figure 2). Early identification of stakeholder groups is crucial to successful selection efforts. "Without such involvement," writes Stevenson and Pellicer (1992), "change is perceived as a 'top-down' process, misunderstood and often resented by

Figure 2

Two-Team Approach and Stakeholder Groups
(note two arrows from each element)



those charged with its implementation" (p. 137) Haphazard identification of stakeholder groups can lead to acrimony or sabotage of change efforts.

2. Decide to Form a Selection Delegation

A good method of selecting team members is by selection delegation. In this method, a delegation of interested stakeholders who are *not* going to serve on the design team or the advisory board is asked to select members for both teams based on predetermined criteria. It is not recommended that only one person select the team members. If an individual working alone, say the school principal, identifies all the team members, the community may view the team(s) as being "stacked" rather than representative of the larger community.

Therefore, it is recommended that a delegation be formed in order to identify and select team members.

The most common criticism of selection delegations is that, if the criteria are not followed, partisan choices are likely to result. Sumption and Engstrom (1966) suggest that the "group" membership ties which result from the delegation approach may be emphasized to the point that team members are not able to collaborate. As long as the criteria are kept in the forefront of the selectors' minds, it is unlikely that such conflicts will emerge.

Another difficulty with selection delegations is that they take time. Time must be spent selecting the delegation and meeting with them to choose

participants for advisory and design teams. Nevertheless, as we have argued earlier, the success of community participation efforts depends on the caliber of volunteers selected.

3. Hold "Town" Meetings

One way of identifying people to serve on a selection delegation—and a way of identifying possible candidates for the teams—is to set up several "town" meetings where interested individuals, teachers, students, community members, school board members, and administrators can be brought together. During these meetings, representatives of various constituencies should be identified to serve on the selection delegation. It is imperative that these individuals be visible opinion leaders of the group they represent, but also that they are not able or willing to serve on the advisory or design teams themselves. Opinion-leader delegates earn early community buy-in, which will pay off during the design and implementation processes. Identifying opinion leaders, however, requires careful observation throughout several meetings in order to pinpoint those who cannot or will not serve on an advisory or design team but who might be involved in the selection delegation.

These meetings are also an opportune way to gather a set of names as a core of prospective team candidates. Simple forms that can be completed showing interest in service should be made available to attendees. The forms should avoid long questions or expectations of essay answers, which may discourage representation of stakeholder groups whose members have weak literacy skills. The form should simply ask for name, address, phone number, occupation, relationship to school (optional), and possibly a *short* statement about why the individual is interested in volunteering for service on the design or advisory team (optional). An announcement encouraging community members who would like more information to phone or stop by the school is highly recommended, as it may encourage members of the community who cannot complete the form to offer service to change their educational system. See Figure 3 for a sample Team Member Candidate Volunteer Form.

During the Town Meeting all attendees should be encouraged to nominate themselves or others whom they feel would positively influence the design of their school. The function of the team and the time commitment required should be made clear during the meeting. Volunteers who are not sincerely committed to offering their time to systemic restructuring efforts or who are more interested in "honorary" positions should be discouraged. Candidates must be willing to give of

their time and themselves for the betterment of their schools.

4. Select Delegates

Once the decision has been made to create selection delegations, the names of candidates for all teams having been collected at town meetings, a short period of time should be spent choosing members of stakeholder groups who can serve on the selection delegation. Selection delegations under 10 people have a tendency to come to consensus more quickly. The difficulty with keeping the selection delegation small, in most cases, is attaining representation of all stakeholder groups. This difficulty is likely to resurface during team selection, but keep in mind that each delegate or team member may represent more than one stakeholder group.

Some administrators prefer to form several small, three- or four-person delegations, each representing a different stakeholder group, which meet and select representatives for the design team and advisory board. This strategy is not recommended, for two reasons. First, the competing ideologies that delegates bring to the selection task are not socially negotiated if all of the delegates represent the same stakeholder group. Second, the loyalties of the selected candidate are likely to be tied very strongly to the stakeholder group that elected him or her. This can concretize opposing ideologies, resulting in a team that disputes, but never *decides*.

There are also several advantages to a single-selection delegation. First, delegates' competing ideologies are aired during the selection process. Thus, the facilitator for the restructuring process has an opportunity to gain experience dealing with these competing ideologies in the selection delegation and is better prepared to face similar challenges in work with the design team and advisory board. Second, the single-delegation approach may cause the delegates to be more sensitive to competing ideological issues and therefore to choose team members who are at least minimally compatible. Finally, several small delegations never get a sense of what the whole team looks like, while the single-delegation approach lends balance and wholeness to the selection process.

5. Hold Delegation Meeting #1: Orientation

Once the delegates and possible candidates have been identified, meetings of the delegation should be scheduled to discuss the candidates according to the criteria selected for each team (see, e.g., Table 1). It is important to impress upon the delegates the necessity of confidentiality in the selection process. Some things may be said that should

Figure 3

Sample Community Team Candidate Volunteer Form

Community Team Candidate Volunteer Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone (home): _____ (work): _____

Occupation: _____

Relationship to our school: _____

Why are you interested in volunteering to work for change in our school?

not be reflected back to the community because it could hurt feelings or cause community schisms to form which may pose serious opposition later in the process.

During this initial meeting there should be no pressure to quickly select team members. Selection should be a thoughtful process, not a rushed one. Selection criteria and procedures should be reviewed, adapted, and adopted, during the first meeting. It is also important that the delegates are clear about their task and the role that members they select will take in the advisory board and design team.

Profiles of candidates should be developed between the first and second delegation meetings. The school administrator, selection facilitator, or trusted secretary may be enlisted to accomplish this sensitive task. It is important that these profiles not be released to the general public prior to selection, as they might be grist for the community "gossip mill" that might improperly influence the delegates. See Figure 4 for a sample profile sheet.

Figure 4 does not vary much from the volunteer Candidate Form (Figure 3), but may include three additional categories: stakeholder group

represented, delegate of response, and special notes (in bold in Figure 4). These entries are useful in helping to guide discussion on each candidate. The "Stakeholder group(s) represented" would have an entry such as, political leader and/or business community representative. The "Delegate of response" would list the name of a selection delegate who represents the same stakeholder group(s) and would be responsible for initiating and managing the discussion of the candidate. The "Special notes" area of the form is available for additional information which may be of value to the delegates in their selection; such as "this individual has had four children in the school although she has no children currently attending."

6. Hold Delegation Meeting #2: Candidate Overview

The second meeting should be scheduled within a week of the first. The delegation should *not* take several months to select team members; they need to accomplish their task efficiently, effectively, and thoughtfully. During the second meeting, candidate profiles should be presented to the delegation. No discussion should be encouraged at this point about each candidate, only presentation of

Table 1
Selection Criteria (Carr and Garfinkle, 1992)

Advisory Board	Design Team
<p>Community opinion leader*</p> <p>Credible, respected in larger community*</p> <p>Persuasive personality*</p> <p>High level of dissatisfaction with current system*</p> <p>High-profile*</p> <p>Public relations abilities*</p> <p>Representative of stakeholder groups*</p> <p>Represent various viewpoints</p> <p>Consensus-oriented</p> <p>Process oriented</p> <p>Open-minded</p> <p>Compatible with other (preselected) group members</p> <p>Influential</p> <p>* = Primary criteria</p>	<p>School opinion leader*</p> <p>Credible, respected in school community*</p> <p>Cooperative personality*</p> <p>High level of dissatisfaction with current system*</p> <p>Low-profile</p> <p>School relations abilities</p> <p>Representative of stakeholder groups</p> <p>Represent converging purposes*</p> <p>Collaboration-oriented*</p> <p>Task/outcomes oriented*</p> <p>Open-minded*</p> <p>Compatible with other (preselected) group members*</p> <p>Insightful</p> <p>* = Primary criteria</p>

their profiles. In this way all candidates are presented to the delegation, and delegates have time to investigate the candidates prior to discussing them.

7. Hold Additional Delegation Meeting(s)

The third meeting should be scheduled within a week of the second, but at least one full week should have lapsed between the first and the third. Thereafter, discussion meetings should be about once a week for not more than 1 and 1/2 hours each. More frequent meetings or meetings of longer duration are likely to "burn out" your volunteer delegates. People dislike "long" meetings!

During the third and subsequent meetings, delegates should be asked to openly discuss the potential of any given candidate for service on design or advisory boards. In an effort to facilitate dis-

cussion, a set of items which may be considered for each candidate is presented in Figure 5. This figure represents a suggested sequence and a set of selection criteria based on Table 1 which may be used in delegation meetings.* Such forms can be copied or made into transparencies for group discussion purposes. Showing the group the direction of their discussion can be helpful in keeping them on task.

Since the number of successful candidates is not *absolute*, it is easiest to divide candidates into simple "yes" or "no" decisions at first. An alterna-

*These selection criteria were first presented at the International Conference for Technology and Education, Paris, France. For a more complete discussion of the importance and derivation of these selection criteria, see Carr and Garfinkle (1992).

Figure 4

Sample Community Team Candidate Profile Form

Community Team Candidate Profile Form	
Name:	
Address:	
Phone (home):	(work):
Occupation:	
Relationship to our school:	
Reason(s) candidate cites for being interested in volunteering to work for change in our school:	
Stakeholder group(s) represented:	
Delegate of response:	
Special notes:	

tive to this approach is to set aside several "slots" that need to be filled based on identified stakeholder groups. This can be effective as long as several individuals are considered for each slot. In this way a "short list" can be created and issues of balance in ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status can be considered in addition to the stakeholder group representation. This process can be more complicated to manage, and simple "yes" or "no" selection may precede the slating of a short list to combine these two strategies.

After initial decisions have been made, it is important to present the entire list to the delegation to ensure their acceptance and recognition of the whole field of candidates as it is being formed. Despite an initial acceptance of the slate, it is important to remember that changes can be made, and candidates who are not on the initial slate may be reconsidered later if commitment cannot be confirmed (Step #8) for slated candidates. Therefore, it is important that these decisions again remain confidential.

Drawn from the pool of "yes's," the final team slate should be discussed. It is recommended that

the design team receive first consideration. This is because the design team will require the strongest cohesion and commitment. Therefore, it may be easier to put the most delicate puzzle together first, and follow it by selecting the advisory board members. Each of the candidates should be discussed at length, extolling their strengths and pointing out weaknesses at this point in the process.

Throughout the selection process, the *slate* should be continually referred to, as opposed to selecting two or three members and then setting that list aside to consider the next candidate as an individual. Each candidate will be *part of a team* and should be considered in light of the balance within the whole group. At the conclusion of these discussions, there should be a single slate for the design team and a separate slate for the advisory board which the delegation can accept *as a whole*.

These final steps should take no more than three or four additional meetings, and the entire process should take no more than seven meetings—spanning no more than six weeks; in fact, a month is preferable. One other note of caution: it is

Figure 5

Sample Selection Delegation Discussion Guide

Candidate Discussion

1. Review of candidate profile
2. Discussion from Delegate of Response
3. Discussion from other delegates
4. Evaluation of candidate against criteria *(The selection delegation should add to or modify these criteria as needed)*
 - √ Opinion Leader?
 - √ Credible?
 - √ Effective Personality?
 - √ Dissatisfied?
 - √ Profile? (high or low?)
 - √ Public/School relations abilities?
 - √ Represent needed balance?
 - Stakeholder group?
 - Ethnicity?
 - Gender?
 - Socio-economic status?
 - Alternative viewpoint?
 - √ Consensus/Collaboration oriented?
 - √ Process/Product oriented?
 - √ Open-minded?
 - √ Compatible personality (particularly with already slated candidates)?
5. Wrap-up discussion and vote (if necessary) on status of candidate:
 - ◇ YES? ◇NO?

important that the selection process does not relegate those who couldn't quite "measure up" to design team standards to the advisory board. These two teams have distinct criteria, and the advisory board should not become a "second chance" lottery.

8. Confirm Commitment

Once the team members have been chosen, it is important to confirm their commitment. This is a very important step—without it your team may have high levels of turnover. If sufficient commitment is lacking among several of the candidates, an additional meeting of the delegation may be necessary to approve a revised slate. These additional meetings should emphasize balance on the whole team as each new candidate is considered for service.

9. Hold a "Coming Out" Event

It is a good idea to have a planned "coming out" event for the new team members. Interested parties should know who has been selected to serve on the teams, and therefore who they can go to both to get information about the change effort and to give their input for the school design. This event can also be cause for celebration, which can generate much needed enthusiasm.

10. Ensure Self-Renewal of Teams

Self-renewal is important for any working system, particularly educational change systems (Havelock, 1973). Generally, after the team is formed, it has self-renewing capabilities. It can select its own replacement members. However, balanced representation must be assured, and

selection criteria must continue to be considered in selecting replacement members.

Conclusions

In this article, we selected a definition of community-as-system which accounts for the social complexities inherent in the educational enterprise. We discussed the importance of selection, and suggested that time spent planning selection efforts is worth the investment. We offered a set of precursors to selection and a model of selection procedures for use by practitioners.

This model seeks to offer guidelines that might be helpful to practitioners in public schools. This is not a magical formula. This model should be modified to meet the needs of local communities, and we expect compromises to be made which will balance the need for expedient educational change plans and the need for stakeholder support. However, these compromises have prices. While it may be tempting to shortcut these procedures in order to expedite the process of change, it should be recognized that doing so will have consequences, possibly major consequences.

Further investigation should focus on the implementation of these guidelines in practical settings. These guidelines represent a synthesis of theoretical recommendations and interviews with administrators. Trying out this model in practice will identify the consequences of utilizing or ignoring the guidelines.

Amid renewed interest in community participation, issues of member selection are crucial. Many cases exist currently where excellent change efforts have been derailed or sabotaged due to the lack of early community buy-in. This is a sad state of affairs and can be avoided. If change agents plan selection efforts with care, outstanding community participants can be identified for service on systemic restructuring teams.

These guidelines offer a starting point for selection efforts which reach beyond the traditional "public relations" postures of many schools toward true community participation. Unless all community members have deep feelings of ownership in their current educational system, the prevalent tide of "negativism" promises only to increase, with resultant and continued lack of public support for the public schools. □

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