



## SUMMARY OF IFUW DISCUSSION ON CHALLENGES OF MULTIGENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP 8 – 21 September 2009

Many thanks to all those who participated in this discussion. It was interesting to note that as one member raised an issue, this would stimulate further comments from other participants. The IFUW Membership Committee was happy to note that Independent Members also took part.

The approaches and roles played by the various generations were debated and in general it was agreed that leadership teams should comprise the different age groups. There was, however, a note of warning that too much diversity in age and interests and high turnover in membership can cause strain on implementing continuous long-term activities.

### DIFFERENT STYLES OR APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP

Older leaders were seen as more conservative, wanting to strictly follow procedures but also having high commitment to the ideals and goals that affect society as a whole. They work hard and have professional expertise. However, they may expect the younger generation to just “do as they are told”, ie may be authoritarian.

Younger leaders were seen as more flexible, having new skills, enthusiasm and energy and often ready to look beyond the rules. They are not always grounded in a thorough understanding of the vision/mission of the NFA. They prefer to work with intensity for shorter periods of time on projects for which they have a passion and are not so interested in a “titled” role but rather in the effective use of their time. They are often taking up leadership roles within their workplace. They want to see the connection to their own careers and family situations. They look for co-operation, not coercion.

There was a sense that more understanding is needed between the generations.

### LEADERSHIP ROLES

Many NFAs (especially the longer established ones) are experiencing difficulties in getting members to take on leadership roles.

#### Reasons

Time constraints (young families, careers/own business, grandchildren)

Retirees want to enjoy their free time (travel etc)

Cultural/social context

Economic environment (post Soviet/post war/economic recession)

Financial Constraints (leaders often must pay own travel/accommodation, etc)

Larger NFAs – more levels of administrative posts

Unease about taking on specific official functions (treasurer/secretary etc)

Members reluctant to vie for office

Not enough new members coming into the NFA (finance/time/do not see any immediate gain/not appreciating the vision of the organization)

## Consequences

Branches are closing close

Long-serving members continue to occupy leadership roles:

they are unable to move into mentoring/guiding roles

they find it hard to “let go”

others see them as “owning” the organization

they must carry more responsibility as there are fewer leaders

Leadership effectiveness is limited

Projects cannot be undertaken or developed

Face-to-face meetings are limited; although technology ensures communication is maintained, the development of person relationships is hampered

Lack of a proper succession policy

There are fewer members available to be involved at IFUW level

## Possible Solutions

- Move away from the traditional official roles to offer more flexibility (eg set up a management team with each person having a specific portfolio, where members retire on a rotational basis; have a flatter structure, even perhaps no president at all, spreading the responsibilities)
- Move away from traditional terms of office (eg allow officials to remain in office as long as they are willing for stability and continuity – but also, have a term of office of one year at a time so no one feels “trapped” into long service)
- Do not require members to move up the hierarchy eg first serving as a committee member, then a deputy and then president
- Create short-term projects or working parties, spearheaded by members with a passion or the expertise necessary for that specific aspect
- Strategize to become more financially self-sufficient; do not merely rely on dues (although dues are important as a unifying factor). For example, members with professional skills could use them within the organization to provide paid profession services to clients.
- Encourage younger leaders to interact with older leaders so that they may learn from them
- Arrange for older leaders take on an “understudy” or work with a younger leader during a transitional period
- Emphasize the opportunities for members to gain leadership training and experience
- Provide new members with full orientation as to the vision and rules of the NFA
- Identify potential leaders as early as possible (eg within the first year), allocate specific but short roles with challenging responsibilities – in this way the young member or new member feels her abilities have been recognized and she can also gain an understanding of the advantages of leadership.
- Develop other incentives in addition to recognition
- Invite younger members to take up a leadership role and provide encouragement
- Ensure the operation of democratic procedures
- Ensure there are no unnecessary restrictions on membership qualifications; allow for a student membership category
- Show trust and support for new leaders

Allow for flexibility. Leadership combines two different aspects – (a) management of the operation and (b) future-thinking and innovation. Usually one person does not combine both abilities and therefore the leadership team should encompass both aspects.

### Technology

There was general agreement that the advances in technology have made an enormous impact on the leadership of the NFAs. Some limitations mentioned were that certain social network sites cannot be accessed in the work place and the issue of information overload.

Most leaders make use of technology although, naturally, the younger leaders rely almost totally on technology while older leaders will use it as “one of the tools” available to them,

The advantages to leaders is that the internet is :

- fast and less expensive than traditional methods of communication
- leaders can communicate easily with one another and with the membership
- members can participate to the extend that satisfies the individual, can be more open in their opinions
- information can be more easily distributed and/or accessed directly by members (thereby having no “gate-keepers”)
- the business of the NFA can be conducted more effectively, decision-making is easier and quicker and with greater participation

Websites should be up-to-date and offer members information on what role they could play without them having to be asked.

Face-to-face meetings and more personal contact were, however, also recognized as important for relationship building.

### MENTORSHIP

Mentoring was identified as useful way to integrate young leaders and achieve successful multigenerational leadership. A starting point is to have new members fully oriented into the NFA through a structured mentorship programme. It is essential that the mentor does not impose her authority but rather guides the mentee to make full use of her abilities and to evaluate situations from different perspectives. Mentors should perceive others’ creative ability and ensure that this is utilized in keeping the organization afloat. The programme should ensure that the NFA uses the members’ academic skills through hands-on training.

## SOME IDEAS ON WHAT CREATES A SUCCESSFUL NFA

- Must have a common vision/agreed goals
- Ensure continued leadership
- Ensure adequate human and material resources
- Good proposal writing to raise funds
- Generate funds from various sources
- Have a good team in place and then nurture/cultivate/motivate/inspire leaders and prospective leaders
- Encourage and invite members from different professions/age groups to take up official positions/accept nomination at election times
- Share responsibilities equitably between generations
- Dedication
- Willingness to take responsibility
- Encourage initiative
- Commitment to participate as fully as possible
- Provide programmes of interest to grow the NFA
- Promote and publicize activities and achievements
- Share information – also on scholarships, awards, conferences etc
- Have a local focus
- Limit the amount of personal expenses for leaders

Whatever leadership style or approach used – if it is done in the interest of the group and done democratically, it will be successful

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