



Findings, Fall 2022

Student-Driven Leadership at Carnegie Mellon University

Our Public Talk,
Personal Experience,
Individual & Community Response

*A report on rival hypotheses
and options from the*
CARNEGIE MELLON
COMMUNITY THINK TANK

This Think Tank project considers the ways CMU students
approach student-driven leadership and how they navigate difficult
situations.

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The Carnegie Mellon Community Think Tank

These members of the Leadership, Dialogue and Change seminar collected critical-incident interviews, designed a Briefing Book and held problem-solving dialogues in search of workable solutions documented in these *Findings*. The Think Tank's structured, solution-oriented process:



- Opens cross-institution, cross-hierarchy, intercultural dialogue in which students, educators, administrators, service professionals, researchers, and community supporters meet as collaborators
- Structures this talk into a problem-solving search for diverse perspectives, rival hypotheses, and collaborative solutions
- Draws often untapped expertise into policy discussions building more comprehensive understandings of problems and options for action
- Documents the “situated knowledges” and lived experiences of a variety of community members so that their documented thoughts and experiences can continue to inform subsequent dialogue

Please visit our website to explore the findings of other Think Tanks, research on intercultural problem-solving, and our guide for developing your own dialogues as an educator, human resource developer, or community group.



Front: Natalie Demaioribus, Apolline Tardy, Ava Folloni

Back: Jacquelyn Horn (Aide), Jimmy Lizama, Zoe Schneider, Amber Quin, Leena Shin, Linda Flower

Advocacy and Coalition-Building Facts

Advocacy Engagement

- 43% of social media users decided to learn more about a political or social issue because of something they read on social media
- Recommendations from friends, family and coworkers drive nearly three-quarters (72%) of global advocates to support issues and causes – it is by far the most powerful motivator
- 60% of high-income, 42% of medium-income and 38% of low-income household members are acting advocates (Fact Sheet on Advocacy and Lobbying)

Coalitions at a Glance

Increased Expertise and Resources. A coalition can bring more expertise and resources to bear on complex issues, where the technical or personnel resources of any one organization would not be sufficient.

Lasting Base for Change. Once groups unite, each group's vision of change broadens. It becomes more difficult for opposition groups to disregard the coalition's efforts.

Competing Interests. Coalition members who prefer high-profile, confrontational tactics might dislike subdued tactics, thinking they are not exciting enough to mobilize support. At the same time, low-profile, conciliatory members might be alarmed by the confrontation advocates, fearing they will escalate the conflict and make eventual victory more difficult.

Advocacy and Organization at Carnegie Mellon University

While the names of all student-led groups oriented to campus change are not collected and listed by Carnegie Mellon (due to the fact that some student-led organizations don't want formal recognition and/or monitoring by the university), there were 470 student organizations registered on TartanConnect, the university's student organization platform, in November 2021. Of these, 362 are officially recognized by the University.

Student-led organizations span a wide variety of interests including religious or spiritual, civic engagement, media, sports, academic, political, identity, artistic and technology. Advocacy- and change-focused organizations break down as follows:

Interests	Advocacy	Governing Bodies	Political
# of Organizations	10	5	2

Recognition Process (Carnegie Mellon)

There is a formal process to register as a new student-led organization at Carnegie Mellon University. It is outlined below for those who wish to pursue it.

1. New organizations must have at least 3 officers and 8 additional members, or 2 officers, one advisor, and 8 additional members.
2. Organizations must develop a set of by-laws or a constitution that will set-up a framework and structure (there is [a checklist](#) for this process).
 - a. It must contain: organization name, mission statement, philosophy, goals, and/or purpose, student membership statement, when recruitment takes place and when membership is open, withdrawal or removal of members, non-discrimination statement for the organization's commitment to abide by the [CMU Statement of Assurance](#), non-discrimination statement, description of officers, terms of office, etc.
 - b. The Graduate Student Assembly, the Provost Office and the Undergraduate Student Senate have partnered to offer all CMU graduate and undergraduate students [free legal consultations](#).
3. Students will schedule a meeting with the Student Body Vice President of Organizations (SBVPO) to discuss your organization and learn more about the recognition process.
4. Students will fill out the New Recognition Application, which will ask you a few questions about your membership, mission and goals, and anticipated activities.
 - a. To find the New Recognition Application on TartanConnect, it will be under the "Groups" tab then "All Groups" section. Click on the "Registering New Organizations" button. Please find [the step-by-step process here](#).
5. Upon submission, students will be contacted by the New Recognition Chair or SBVPO to set-up a meeting for you to present in front of the Committee on Student Organizations (CoSO).
6. The New Recognition Chair or a CoSO representative will work with your organization to develop a set of by-laws or constitution that will set-up the framework and structure of your organization. There is a checklist to walk you through how to develop this framework and structure. A stranger should be able to pick up your document and understand who your organization is, what its purpose is, what the responsibilities of your officers are, etc.

How Students Take Leadership Amidst Conflict

Natalie DeMaioribus, Ava Folloni, Jimmy Lizama, Amber Quinn,
Zoe Schneider, Leena Shin, Apolline Tardy

There are a large number of student-led organizations on Carnegie Mellon's campus with a broad range of interests. As we explored how organizations form, especially ones focused on social change, we began by assuming that students face difficult choices and situations when they take leadership within student groups. During initial interviews, we encountered some problems student leaders shared across contexts, albeit in different forms.

We conducted critical incident interviews with both graduate and undergraduate student leaders on campus. Interviewees shared their perspectives and internal reasoning as they tried to navigate difficult situations. Throughout our interviews, we saw three interrelated (but unsurprising) issues that students faced while taking leadership in their communities.

1) Group members have conflicting motivations and interests.

Our data suggest that group members are juggling schoolwork, professional development, personal issues, and even loyalties to other groups, which affect their priorities and participation.

2) Student leaders must compromise when faced with conflict in the group.

Our data suggest that compromising over conflict is difficult for student leaders. Often, they must negotiate multiple sets of needs, values, and interests.

3) Tensions arise when student leaders overlook disempowerment.

Our data suggest that some group members are disempowered by social, economic, and political barriers. If overlooked, this can lead to tension between leaders who require participation and members who aren't able to participate.

After collecting and analyzing the data from our interviews, we held a roundtable discussion and invited student leaders, SLICE staff, and administrators. Invitees received a briefing booklet before the discussion, containing four short scenarios that dramatize these issues (included in this document as well). The group went through each scenario, brainstorming additional perspectives, problems, and options.

This document is a synthesis of the briefing booklet and the results from the roundtable discussion.

Highlights from Our Findings

Be flexible and responsive

It's important to be open-minded about change even when it's uncomfortable. Listen to criticism and feedback—try to anticipate it if you can. Always solicit different perspectives—even from yourself.

Actively solicit and consider different viewpoints among members

- Offer a **variety of ways** to be involved.
- Make events **accessible** to all (e.g. disability accommodations, dietary restrictions).

As your organization evolves, build flexibility and perspective-taking into it

- Be **transparent** with members about expectations and potential conflicts (e.g. competing needs, values, and interests; potential risk from organizational activities—see Scenario 1).
- Use an **intersectional lens** to guide the organization's growth. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw has defined intersectionality as consideration of how “[social] structures make certain identities the consequence of and vehicle for vulnerability.” How do members' perspectives change with their different, overlapping identities?

Get support

Connection is important—among members, among leaders, among organizations.

- Try to create a “**network of care**”—people who are comfortable and committed to helping each other and the organization. In addition to feeling good, this is useful in lots of ways (collaboration, networking, rejuvenation, friendship, etc.). One way to do this is to provide unstructured or semi-structured socializing/networking time.
- **Collect opinions and perspectives** from stakeholders—not just members, but people you're trying to help, administrators, other organizations doing related work, etc.).
- **Talk to other organizations** to share concerns, ideas, possibilities, and resources.

The Think Tank says SLICE may be a resource to facilitate these connections for student organizations.

- Don't hesitate to **tap people** outside the group.
 - Mentors (mentorship is available for formally recognized advocacy groups through CMU's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion office—instructions at [Recognition Process \(Carnegie Mellon\)](#), page 5).
 - Quick consultations—a 20-minute “mentorship” session with someone with more experience.
 - Mediators to resolve conflict.

Leadership burnout is real

It's a common story: sometimes a leader shoulders most of the responsibility, feeling stressed and unappreciated, resenting group members who do less work, worrying that the organization will collapse without them. Even when others agree to help, they may not follow through.

- It may be important to **let some things fail**—otherwise, members will see success even though they don't help. Auditing failure is one way to be clear about the stress the leader is facing.
- Build **continuity with younger members**, perhaps by mentoring, or building a toolkit or archive to help future leaders run the organization.
- **Distribute the workload**, perhaps with a non-hierarchical structure, rotating leadership, and/or collaborative updates during meetings.

Make documentation intentional

Look at all your documents. Which do you really need? Which do people use? New organizations need to build everything—established organizations need to revisit it on a regular basis.

- **Think through** formal documents (e.g. constitution, mission statement).
 - Is there a specific point(s) in the year that members actually look at these documents (training, initiation, review)?
 - How easy is it for the group to access and revise them?
 - Are there clear mechanisms for changing and updating them?
- Will you codify **informal expectations and guidelines**? How? How will you communicate or change unwritten expectations?

Scenario 1. Organizing a Protest

Our Early Sense of the Problem

Our critical incident interviews led us to believe there were several issues underlying how students approach social change on campus. Our data revealed three facets of organization that students encountered:

- Student involvement is crucial to success (in this case, “success” can be defined as creating change in pursuit of group ideals). Participation can show that an issue is prevalent and widespread, but it’s hard to be sure how much participation there will actually be.
- Disempowerment exists among students and can hinder progress. It can take the form of social, political, and economic barriers to entry or participation.
 - Students may fear repercussions for their involvement in advocacy if their social or institutional environment is hostile to their values
 - Disempowerment can also take place within the structure of the student organization itself if students feel they are not heard by leaders
- Student leaders may not understand the barriers that group members experience
 - Sometimes leaders think they alone can make the best decision for the group. This results in blind spots.
 - Actions that leaders propose can feel exclusive if they are unaware of concerns or barriers to participation among members
 - All-or-nothing situations and proposals can lose valuable ideas from members, or discourage participation because group members feel uninvested in the process, even if they are invested in the end-goal

Scene

The setting is a Catholic University. Students at the University are having trouble getting their birth control prescription filled, so they form a student group to advocate for their reproductive health needs. The student leaders call a group meeting, and in that meeting the leaders bring up organizing a protest.

Taylor: Alright everyone, we're all here today so we can organize an on-campus protest and pressure the university to meet our demands. To maximize our impact, we need as many people as possible to participate.

Sam: That's right. We'll need an estimate for turnout, so can everyone willing to participate in the protest raise their hand?

About two thirds of group members raise their hand, the other third sits quietly with their eyes trained on the ground.

Taylor: Oh...I was expecting more people to get involved. Is it an issue with the date and time we picked? What if the protest happened on a weekday, would more of you be willing to participate?

Some group members who didn't raise their hands shake their heads no.

Sam: Then what's the matter?

Group Member: *Speaking softly from the back of the room.* It kind of feels like you're forcing us to participate when it might be a problem for some of us. Some of us can't protest since our parents pay our tuition and they wouldn't want to see us involved in that.

Taylor cuts off the group member and begins speaking to the room.

Taylor: Well, we need participation in order to make our issues heard, don't we? It's a little disheartening to see that not everyone is participating the way we need them to.

Students shuffle uncomfortably in their seats, a few clear their throats distractedly. Sam looks around the room to see if anyone else will talk.

Sam: Okay then, why don't we adjourn today's meeting and meet again in a few days.

The Story Behind the Story

Taylor, the first group leader, is thinking:

- "All of us in the group are affected by the University's policies, so we should all be working together to make our voices heard. We need numbers and the only way for that to happen is if people care about the issues and participate."

Sam, the second group leader, is thinking:

- “We’ve gone through all of this work to organize a group, why are people having second thoughts now? If our members don’t think this issue is important enough to go to a protest, then maybe it’s not worth it.”

Group members are thinking:

- “I want to participate but there are so many factors I have to consider. My parents are paying for my tuition and they wouldn’t want me to attend a protest, they might even cut me off for doing that.”
- “If I participate in this protest, people are going to know that I’m trying to get a birth control prescription filled. I don’t want them to know that I’m sexually active, how could I show my face in class again?”
- “If the school finds out I’m actively protesting their policies, they might expel me. I can’t risk my future for one protest.”

What’s the problem?

- The members are diverse and have competing needs, interests, and experiences. Although difference is not the problem, managing differences in these needs, interests, and experiences is.
- We see a tension between student leaders who expect full commitment to a cause and group members who have competing interests affecting their ability to protest.

Possible Options

Option #1: The leaders discuss and restrategize together

Taylor says:

- “Members don’t seem as invested in the cause as I thought they would be. Maybe I should remind them of the stakes so they feel motivated. I could even require them to participate to see who is really engaged in our organization.”

Sam says:

- “Maybe they want to protest in a different way, but I don’t know what forum they would like because I don’t know what their reservations are. Maybe Taylor and I can brainstorm what some of these reservations might be.”

Members not present at the leadership meeting say:

- “I feel like my voice doesn’t matter to the people I trusted to help it be heard, so why would it matter to the administration? I don’t want to be forced to do something that will put me at risk. Some of us won’t be participating.”

Option #2: The leaders restrategize with members

Taylor says:

- “If I want to get the numbers we need for this protest, I’m going to have to get to the root of the concern here. Maybe people didn’t feel comfortable speaking up in the large group, so I can consult more personally to figure out a new plan.”

Sam says:

- “We are short on time here for organizing this protest, so maybe we can have a town hall in which we ask people to come with and be prepared to speak about their concerns with the protest.”

Members say:

- “I’m worried they’re not going to take me seriously when I tell them my fears.”

Option #3: Before proposing a protest, leaders use an intersectional lens as a framework to anticipate and address differences in member needs, values, and interests

Taylor says:

- “Maybe we shouldn’t assume that all of our members have the ability to participate in a public protest.”
- “Some of our members have parents who would not want their kids protesting. And many of our parents are paying for our education...”

Sam says:

- “We are at a conservative Catholic school, after all, and some of our members don’t want to out themselves as sexually active.”

Option #4: Find inclusive methods to bring up the issue to the university

Taylor says:

- “It looks like protesting was not the best method for everyone who wanted to get involved. Maybe we could consider others like an anonymous petition?”

Sam says:

- “There are many other ways to let the university know without putting ourselves out there. The key word is anonymous so that people can still get involved without feeling targeted.”

Members say:

- “This is a cause that is affecting us and we want our voices heard. If we can do it without identifying ourselves, we would feel a lot more comfortable participating.”

Scenario 2. Perils of Organizing a Union

Our Early Sense of the Problem

Our critical incident interviews led us to believe there were issues underlying how students, especially graduate students, approach social change on campus. Our data revealed three facets of organization that graduate students encountered:

- Disempowerment is prevalent among graduate students and can hinder progress. It can take the form of social, political, and economic barriers to entry or participation (e.g. cost of living, visa status and nationality, gender and racial prejudice)
- Student involvement is crucial to success (in this case, “success” can be defined as creating change in pursuit of group ideals). Participation can show that an issue is prevalent and widespread, but it’s hard to be sure how much participation there will actually be.
- Members may have competing interests (often financial and academic). When they aren’t upfront about their competing interests, tension rises between leaders who don’t know why members can’t dedicate resources to the cause and members who are stretched thin by other priorities.

Scene

The setting is a major research university in the United States. Graduate students are having a difficult time living off their allocated stipends amid rising costs of living. We see a few graduate students gathered in the student lounge to discuss their financial difficulties and plans to address the situation. All students in this dialogue are grad students.

Avery: *Sighs.* I’m having a really hard time affording rent and groceries with the stipend the department gives us. I’ve never needed a food pantry before, but I already had to go to the on-campus one a couple times this semester.

Jordan: Same here. I have to work two extra jobs just to make sure I can pay rent, but I don’t know how much it’s helping. The hours I spend working are getting in the way of the time I can spend on my dissertation.

Avery: You know, I’ve heard of folks in other departments that are talking about unionizing for better wages.

Francis and Jordan exchange surprised looks.

Francis: Yeah, I've also heard some conversations and it could be a good idea. I'd consider joining a union, but I also have to think about my status as an international student. I don't want any retaliation that could jeopardize my visa.

Jordan: I'm in a similar situation. If I join in on union organizing, my lab hours could be at risk, and I can't make ends meet without my pay from those lab hours.

Francis: And we have to keep in mind that this could be a long process – change doesn't just happen overnight. I can't tell my landlord they'll have my rent check when the university decides to sit down with a union.

Avery considers their situations.

Avery: Hmm, it seems like you'd both be risking a lot by joining a union.

Francis: Here's an idea – what if instead of a union we form a “collective” in our department that can negotiate with faculty and administration?

Avery: What do you mean?

Francis: With a departmental collective, we show both the department and university that the graduate students are united in a cause.

Jordan: But what if they don't take us seriously?

Avery: We could always stop working as research assistants and professors until the university is forced to talk with us.

Jordan: *Looking worriedly between the two grad students.* I don't know...I need my weekly paychecks in order to eat. And what if the University fires us instead of listening to our demands?

Francis: I think collective organizing would give us the power of many. I know other folks in the department are also experiencing financial difficulties, and if we're all in it together, they'll be more willing to see our situations as an issue. We'll need as many people as we can get to stand behind us. What do you both think?

Avery: I'm in!

Jordan: I have a lot to think about before I decide...the idea sounds like it could work, but I'd have to see if I could think of a work-around for giving up my lab hours. Francis, you aren't scared about how a collective could impact your visa?

Francis: *Shrugging.* I mean, yeah, but I wouldn't have to be the face of it – I could work behind the scenes and have some cover.

The Story Behind the Story

Avery is thinking

- “I know the situation is complicated and people are in tough positions, but we will be better off organizing as a collective now rather than doing nothing.”

Jordan is thinking

- “I know Avery means well, but collective bargaining—even at a small level—is a big step. Besides, I don’t even know if I can afford to give up my hours or if the University would listen to students.”

Francis is thinking

- “I can tell Jordan is worried, but this collective idea might give us enough cover to organize but still protect ourselves. Jordan and I can’t be the public faces of collective meetings, but we can help out in the background by designing flyers and compiling email lists.”

The professor supervising the lab is thinking

- “I’m sympathetic to the financial challenges these students are facing, but this lab just got a grant from the National Science Foundation and we need to have preliminary findings by the due date. Students organizing and striking would be a disaster.”

What’s the problem?

- Group members in a student-led group come to the table with differing priorities and conflicting interests. These motivations are often mistaken for disinterest in a cause, which may not be the case.
- Tensions arise between group members who are disempowered by social, economic, or political barriers and leaders who don’t understand these experiences.

Possible Options

Option #1: The collective leaders speak on behalf of all graduate students

Avery says:

- “Including the names of every graduate student in the department presents our group as a large collective, giving us bargaining power and keeping the University from singling any one student out.”

Francis says:

- “I’m glad we moved forward with the collective, but I’m not happy that Avery shared my name. I hope the University won’t target me once they see my name.”

Jordan says:

- “I wasn’t ready to make this decision. Avery shouldn’t have gone forward without everyone’s consent. I can’t dedicate my time to this collective and risk losing my hours in the lab.”

Option #2: The collective forms with flexible involvement

Avery says:

- “There aren’t as many people involved as I hoped, but it’s better than nothing. I wish we had a bigger representation of graduate students so we could be heard.”

Francis says:

- “I’m glad I can be involved in a way that makes me comfortable. I’m actively making a difference, but can still protect my education.”

Jordan says:

- “I wish the collective luck and appreciate what they’re doing for all of us. Maybe I can contribute in some way once I figure out my lab hours.”

Option #3: The collective forms without a requirement for involvement, but secures a constituency of at least 66% so that it can speak for the majority of the department’s PhD students

Avery says:

- “Alright, we had two thirds of the department’s PhD students sign onto the Collective mission statement. We can push for change at the department level without alienating anyone in the department who can’t sign on.”

Francis says:

- “I’m glad our department is organizing for better conditions. I felt for Jordan, I really did, but I still wanted to improve their and our circumstances even if they couldn’t participate.”

Jordan says:

- “I’m glad the Collective is able to give a voice to our struggles without requiring participation from vulnerable students like me. I support the group’s mission, I just can’t risk my future.”

Option #4: To distribute labor and risk, the collective forms on the basis of a non-hierarchical model with multiple leaders rotating roles and delegating tasks

Avery says:

- “It looks like a lot of us want to get involved in helping start and run this collective. If we all play to our strengths, it could really benefit us in getting tasks done.”

Francis says:

- “I’m so glad that I still get to be a leader without being the figurehead. I know I can handle a lot of logistics, so I can send out the emails and book the meeting rooms.”

Jordan says:

- “The distribution of leadership and work seems more reasonable now that there are a few of us stepping up. I like the idea of rotating tasks and responsibilities especially since I will be in the lab a lot.”

Scenario 3. Conflict Caused by Assumptions

Our Early Sense of the Problem

Our critical incident interviews led us to believe that some student leaders struggle with approaching conflict. It's difficult enough to navigate different perspectives at the best of times, but additional factors included:

- Students—especially undergraduates—may not have much experience with formal organizations. They may not see a problem with speaking for the club, or taking a seemingly sensible action without reviewing organizational documents first.
- Group members aren't always considering the leaders' positions (and vice versa).
- In some clubs, no one actually looks at the formal documents.

Scene

A.J. is a member of a student advocacy club that has come under fire for a lack of accessibility at a recent event. In response to this, A.J. used their senior position at the school newspaper to publish an apology and make promises of action that were not yet finalized by club leadership. At the organization's next meeting, A.J. was confronted by the president of the club.

President: Why did you think that it was okay to speak about the club without asking me? By doing this, you drew even more attention to this issue, and made promises that we can't keep. We don't have enough money in our budget to fund all the accommodations you mentioned, and if you had asked me before publishing, you would know that.

A.J.: I didn't think it was that big of a deal. We all talked about making these changes, anyone in the club could've told other people about them. Besides, it's not like I broke a rule or anything.

President: It *is* a big deal! According to our club's constitution, leadership can use its discretion when making statements about the club.

A.J.: No one even reads the constitution! And that isn't a rule anyway. I didn't do anything wrong.

President: Clearly you did, and now I have to figure out how to deal with this mess!

The Story Behind the Story

What is A.J. thinking?

- “The president never said we couldn’t write about the club like that - I see other club members talking to their friends all the time about stuff like this. I thought I was helping the club out by doing this. I don’t see why the president got so upset.”
- “No one in the club reads the constitution, and leadership knows that. They can’t just decide to enforce it when they want.”

What is the president thinking?

- “Why didn’t A.J. ask me before speaking for the club in the school newspaper? They have no authority to do that.”
- “I don’t know how to deal with this. A.J. was clearly out of line, but this isn’t specifically in the constitution, because this situation has never come up before.”

What is the problem?

- There are no explicit rules or precedents in this situation

Organization leaders say:

- “Our members share similar values and goals, but they don’t always have the same idea of how to turn it into a reality, or what exact steps they should take.”
- “There isn’t always a precedent for every situation. A student organization is a high-turnover environment, so it’s hard to handle tricky situations effectively.”
- “It’s important to make sure members are familiar with their club’s constitution, and that the constitution is updated regularly”
- Members and officers have conflicting assumptions about their roles and about the club

Members say:

- “It’s not like the President is my boss or anything.”
- “The officers are there because we need a few people to step up and help lead the group, but we are the ones doing the work!”

Officers say:

- “We’re in charge, and the members should do what we say.”
- “Officers are elected to do things like what A.J. did—if they wanted to help publicize us, they should have checked with one of us first.”
- Leaders of a campus group may have no real authority, especially involving discipline

Organization leaders say:

- “We try to gain the respect of our members so that when difficult situations arise, we have more authority.”
- “Sometimes you have to make difficult decisions on the spot, especially about dealing with a new situation.”
- “It’s important to be as transparent as possible because not everyone will be happy with your decision.”

Members say:

- “If a leader is younger than me—or even a peer—it can be hard to actually see them as an authority figure.”
- “Sometimes I think I would do a better job of handling stuff than the current leaders do.”

Possible Options

Option #1: The president could make A.J. retract their statement

- The president of the club could make A.J. write a retraction in the *Tartan* about their previous statement
- This could potentially embarrass A.J. publicly, and disenfranchise them from the club and its leadership
- The president would have no way of enforcing this decision, unless they threatened A.J. with a loss of club privileges or membership

Option #2: The president could have a conversation with A.J.

- The president could hold a personal conversation with A.J. to examine their action’s negative impact on the club, and potential future actions

- This conversation could also involve the entire club, to motivate reflection on individual choices and their consequences for the organization

Option #3: The president could consult with club members

- At the next meeting, the president could ask the members what they think about the situation and about officers' and members' respective roles.

Option #4: Get outside help

- The group leaders reach out to a mentor, advisor, or another neutral third party who can give advice or even mediate the conflict.
- In future situations, such a mentor may be used to avoid conflict before it occurs

Scenario 4. How does one enforce expectations?

Our Early Sense of the Problem

Our critical incident interviews led us to believe that many organizations struggled not just with responding to conflict in the moment, but with how to proceed afterwards.

- Leaders who are insecure in their authority (which is common in groups where the leader is the same age, or younger than, their peers) sometimes tend toward aggressive action or overcorrection after an incident where they feel disrespected.
- These leaders are also sometimes unlikely to reach out to a mentor or other third party who could give them the benefit of their experience.
- Again, young leaders may have little experience with organizations and struggle to identify options on their own.

Scene

The club's officers are meeting after this incident.

President: The next thing on the agenda is coming up with an official rule about talking to the media about the club.

Everyone nods.

President: I think it's pretty simple. Just don't speak to anyone about the club.

Secretary: *Anyone?* That seems extreme. What about: "Don't speak to anyone in the media about the club"?

President: All I'm saying is, I'm the only one who should be speaking about the organization.

Secretary: But that's not realistic. You aren't always available.

President: Well, we need *some* rule to keep this from happening again. I'm the one who's responsible for this club, so I get to decide who gets to speak for it.

The Story Behind the Story

What is the President thinking?

- "I'm embarrassed that A.J. shared information that wasn't meant to be shared yet."

- “I’m supposed to be in charge and I feel like our members don’t respect my authority.”
- “Did A.J. do this to provoke me? They could cause a lot of conflict in the club...”

What is the Secretary thinking?

- “A.J. just made a mistake. The President is overreacting.”
- “People won’t want to be in this club if the rules are too strict.”
- “The organization is a team. I don’t like making decisions about how it’s run with only a few of us present.”

What is A.J. thinking?

- “I don’t understand why we need this rule. We don’t have anything to hide.”
- “The President isn’t considering my perspective. As a member, don’t I matter too?”
- “Won’t my piece be a kind of advertisement for the club?”
- “Committing on paper might help us stay more committed to our projects.”

What is another member thinking?

- “Everything about this incident seems vague and disorganized.”
- “This conflict is making me wonder why I joined this club.”

What is the problem?

- Members and officers have conflicting opinions about the infraction.

Officers say:

- “It’s important for the organization’s image and place in the community that we be mindful of how we interact with the public.”

Members say:

- “We want this club to succeed! The more exposure we can get, the better.”
- “If there isn’t a rule about it, you just have to let it go.”
- “I’m disappointed in A.J. They’re acting unpredictable.”
- “I’m glad A.J. spoke up for us. I feel the same way but I’ve been too shy to express myself the way they did.”

- “When there are major disagreements over rules and conduct, maybe the system is flawed and needs to be revisited.”
- A member’s action does not match the values they claim to stand for.

The President says:

- “When A.J. agreed to be in this club—and didn’t step up to be an officer—they were agreeing to a less active role.
- “It’s my role to create organization and ensure harmony and safety within the club. A.J. should want the same things!”

Members say:

- “Don’t we all want the same things? If some people think A.J. undermined the club, then they aren’t acting in a way that supports the club.”

Possible Options

Option #1: Impose a framework

- The executive committee gives a presentation at the next meeting clarifying members’ roles and introducing a new rule on who can speak for the club in public.

Option #2: Reinforcement

- Negative reinforcement: A.J. receives a warning or some form of punishment.
- Positive Reinforcement: A.J. receives encouragement and support from members and leadership, and/or guidance for future decision-making to benefit everyone.

Option #3: Explaining, reasoning

- The President explains to A.J. why their behavior was harmful to the club, to make sure that they understand completely.
- They discuss how to align expectations so that all members are on the same page.

Option #4: Amend the club constitution

- The president could call for a vote to amend the club’s constitution to cover this situation and its consequences.

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