

Skill Requirements

Use of the involvement process doesn't guarantee success. In fact, we've found that people using one of the recommended behaviors are successful only about 80% of the time. Certain skills are required to use any one of the leader behaviors successfully. Effective leaders know when and how to use each of these five behaviors. Each leader behavior requires specific skills and the effective leader is competent in all skills. To use A1 effectively a leader needs good problem solving and decision making skills. Use of G2 may require that the leader and group are skilled in resolving conflict and achieving consensus—in addition to problem solving and decision making.

Let's take a look at the key skills required to use each leader behavior.

Skill Requirements

A1 Analyzing

A2 Skills for A1 plus

Questioning

C1 Skills for A1, A2 plus

Active Listening

C2 Skills for A1, A2, C1 plus

Managing Meetings

Handling Conflict

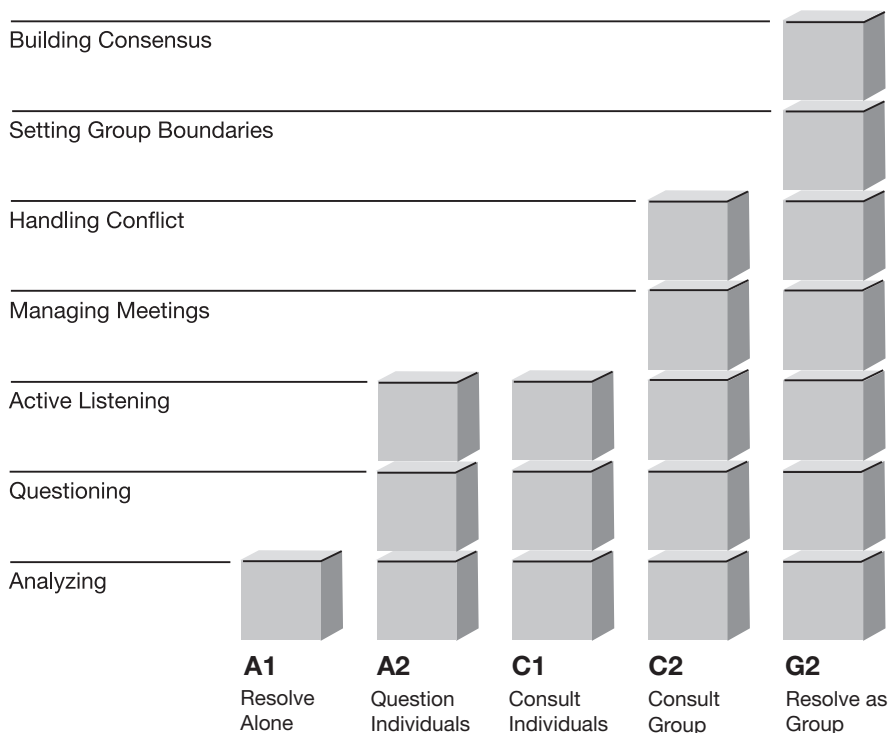
G2 Skills for A1, A2, C1, C2 plus

Set Group Boundaries

Build Consensus

As you can see, these skills are cumulative. The leader must be most skilled to use G2 (Resolve as Group). As participation increases, not only the leader, but also the other participants need these skills. For example, in an effective G2 (Resolve as Group) meeting, everybody attending uses the skill of active listening.

Skills:



Questioning

Questioning individuals to obtain information the leader lacks can lead to a superior solution. In order to obtain the required information, however, the leader must ask good questions. Let's look at the skill of questioning.

Open or Closed Questions?

There are two kinds of questions you can ask, open and closed. Each serves a different purpose. By habit, most of us ask only one kind of question. The leader can be more effective by asking the appropriate kind of question at the appropriate time.

A closed question asks for a one or two word answer, such as "yes" or "last Friday." "When did we start getting complaints from clients?" is a closed question. Closed questions that ask only for a yes or no answer are also called binary questions. "Will we receive the order by Friday?" is a binary question.

Open questions are essentially an invitation to talk. "What do you know about the complaints we're getting from customers?" is an open question.

If you know exactly what information you're lacking, closed questions can be effective. For instance, "When did we change suppliers?" If you don't know exactly what information you're after, ask an open question. For example, "What do you think might be causing the problem?" Unstructured situations require more open questions.

Generally speaking, a leader using an A2 approach will ask predominantly closed questions to find the specific information required. Leaders using more participative approaches will ask more open questions. Closed questions will still be useful, however, to elicit or confirm specific information.

Beware of asking binary questions that lead your information source to the answer you're looking for. "Don't you think...?" is often answered "yes," because that's the easiest response.

Follow a Logical Order

When gathering information, it is important to ask questions in a logical order. Start with general open questions, then follow with more specific open questions. Ask closed questions to check specific facts and to confirm information. "What alternatives should we consider?" Then "How well do you think that option will do in the long run?" Followed by "What's the delivery date?" and "Are those costs included?"

Set the Stage for Your Questions

The leader using A2 need not tell the information source anything about the situation that needs to be resolved. In some situations, the information source may not be very forthcoming unless the leader sets the stage by explaining why the information is important and how it will be used. If you're dealing with a sensitive issue, clarify whether or not the information you gain will be confidential.

Active Listening

Leaders who involve others need to be good listeners. Listening skills become particularly important if others are involved in analysis. When others are involved as a group, all the participants must be good listeners. Listening is a skill we often take for granted. How many of us really are good listeners? Do any of the following interfere with your listening?

Barriers to Listening

- Avoiding: Not taking time to listen
- Daydreaming: Letting your mind wander while listening
- Interrupting: Not letting the speaker finish
- Judging: Evaluating, rather than trying to understand the speaker's words
- Adapting: Hearing what you want to hear, rather than what is actually said
- Preparing: Planning your response, rather than listening
- Pretending: Becoming too mechanical in using listening techniques

These pitfalls are all too common. Listening doesn't just happen, it requires real effort. Effective listening is sometimes called active listening, because the listener is actively involved.

Active Listening

Active listening involves:

- Making contact
- Encouraging the speaker
- Asking questions to clarify
- Paraphrasing to verify meaning

We'll look at each of these in turn.

Make contact

Contact helps the speaker by providing an accepting atmosphere. Contact also helps put the listener in the right frame of mind for listening. An open posture, eye contact and nodding your head following key comments helps create and maintain contact.

Encourage the speaker

Open questions can get the other person started. General encouragements to talk, such as "umm-humm" and "so?" expand communications, once the speaker has started. So does concerned silence.

You can also encourage the speaker with comments that show you are interested in and respect the other person's ideas, opinions and feelings. "That's an interesting point. I hadn't thought of it that way." "I'd like to hear your opinion on that." "You must have been quite upset."

Question to clarify meaning

Questions such as, "What did you mean by...?" and "What are some examples of...?" are useful in clarifying the speaker's meaning.

Paraphrase to verify meaning

Even after the speaker has clarified the meaning, you may want to verify that you and the speaker both have the same meaning.

Paraphrasing involves putting what you think the speaker means into your own words, in order to check your understanding. This allows the speaker to determine whether the message is coming through as

intended. Suppose I said to you, “This is a very poor book.” You might paraphrase by saying, “You mean it has a lot of mistakes.” I could then say, “Yes, that’s exactly what I mean,” or “No, the book is accurate, but it is bound poorly and just falls apart.”

Paraphrasing can also be used to clarify the speaker’s feelings. Suppose I’m sending you a mixed message; I tell you I agree with a particular decision, yet something in my expression and tone of voice suggests I don’t. You reflect back what you think I’m feeling, in order to check your perceptions. You might say, “Something in the way you say that suggests you have reservations about this.” I can then come back with, “No, I don’t have any reservations, I’m just tired” or, “You’re right, I don’t think we should make this decision without involving Production.” In this example, you are paraphrasing the nonverbal, rather than the verbal communication.

Remember that paraphrasing is not an attempt to mind read, but an attempt at mutual understanding. If your paraphrase turns out to be quite different from the speaker’s meaning, you may elicit important additional information.

Managing Meetings

You want to maximize commitment, so you call a meeting. You need a superior solution in a situation that lacks structure, so you call a meeting. You want to build commitment through participation and anticipate conflict, so you call a meeting. We'll talk about how you can ensure that your C2 and G2 meetings are conducted effectively.

Well run meetings require planning prior to the meeting, leadership during the meeting and action planning at the end of the meeting. Let's look at each of these.

Before the Meeting

One of the most common reasons meetings fail is lack of adequate planning. The minutes you invest in planning your C2 or G2 meeting can save you hours of meeting time.

Start by clarifying your objectives. Your primary objective is to make a decision. Secondary objectives relate to your choice of a C2 or G2 leader behavior. Do you want to develop commitment? Build a team? Gain information? Generate creative solutions? Develop skills? Keep your meeting objectives in mind as you plan and conduct the meeting.

You may find it helpful to develop an agenda, a list of steps that leads to your meeting objective. Suppose you want to reach a consensus decision about work procedures and develop the decision making skills of your subordinates. Your meeting agenda could list:

- Clarify purpose
- Evaluate alternatives
- Assess risks
- Make decision

You could also indicate the time allotted to each activity. You now have a road map for achieving your meeting objectives.

Think through how best to conduct the meeting. Who will be the chairperson? If a meeting facilitator is required, who is best for this role? Who will take notes? How will you ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute? In a G2 meeting, will the solution be decided by vote or consensus?

Take time to plan logistics. You may need to contact people well ahead of time in order to schedule a meeting that everybody can attend. Give some careful thought to the room and seating arrangements, to equipment and supplies, and to handling messages.

Announce the meeting well in advance. Let people know the purpose of the meeting, why you want them to attend and how to prepare. Make sure everybody knows the time, duration and location. Remind people, if necessary.

During the Meeting

Start your meeting by reviewing the objectives and agenda.

Explain your role and others' roles during the meeting.

Ensure that everybody understands how the final conclusion will be reached.

Make sure the agenda is visible. Use it to keep the meeting on track. When discussion strays from the meeting agenda, choose whether to revise or return to the agenda. Use an open issues list to keep track of items that, while important, are not on the agenda for this meeting.

Conducting an effective meeting requires decision making, questioning and active listening skills. You will probably need to handle conflict and, in a G2 (Resolve as Group) meeting, build consensus. Each of these skills is discussed in a separate section of the Managing Involvement text.

At the End of the Meeting

The final step in any meeting is action planning. Make sure you know what will be done, by whom and within what time frame. You may also want to invest some time evaluating this session and thinking about how to improve future meetings.

At the end of a G2 meeting, make sure you plan for successful implementation. At the end of a C2 meeting, either tell the group your conclusion or tell them when you will inform them of your conclusion. If your meeting uncovers a need for more information or you run out of time, decide when to hold another meeting and what needs to be done to prepare.

You need only a few minutes to evaluate your C2 (Consult Group) or G2 (Resolve as Group) meeting and find ways to improve future meetings.

As a group, first list techniques and approaches that worked well during the meeting.

Now list ways in which the meeting could be improved.

Finally, discuss how to improve each of the items on the second list.

Five Steps for Handling Conflict

Whether resolution involves gathering more information, negotiating a compromise or collaboration, a five step process is used for handling conflict.

1. Summarize the disagreement

Be objective and focus on the issues, not personalities. "Henry is saying we can do it in six months and Mary says it will take a year," rather than "Mary's very conservative."

2. Confirm accuracy

Ask for confirmation or correction. This encourages individuals and the group to take ownership of the conflict. It may even lead to their resolving the disagreement without further intervention on your part.

3. Establish points of agreement

Narrow down the area of dispute to make it seem more manageable. "Ten minutes ago, we agreed that we have three viable alternatives. Are we still in agreement on that?"

4. Clarify different points of view

Have each individual or subgroup state their point of view. "I think that approach will meet with real opposition from the union," on the one hand and, "I think they'll go for it," on the other. This helps everybody understand the nature of the disagreement. Occasionally, you will find that the opponents have been saying the same thing differently. They are actually in agreement.

5. Facilitate resolution

Involve the whole group in resolving the disagreement. Get additional information, if required. Decide whether to aim for collaboration or settle for compromise. If a collaborative approach is used, have the group brainstorm possible solutions. If collaboration is not necessary or feasible, ask the individuals in conflict to suggest a compromise.

Resolving Conflict About Alternatives

Conflict about alternatives is one of the seven situation variables. When there is likely to be conflict about possible solutions, the involvement process suggests the leader bring people together as a group so this conflict can be discussed and resolved.

Sources of Conflict

Conflict about alternatives can result from people having different information or from having different opinions about the same information. Differences of opinion often result from different values or from a difference in roles in the organization.

If the disagreement results from people having different information, the conflict is usually resolved by obtaining accurate data. If the disagreement results from a difference of opinion about the same information, resolution will require either compromise or collaboration.

Compromise or Collaborate?

Compromise involves a trade-off. Either one side gives in, or both sides give up something to meet in the middle. “Let’s drop my idea and go with your suggestion,” or “Let’s do it your way for the first six months and my way for the rest of the year.”

Collaboration involves both sides working together to come up with a win-win solution. The creativity of the group may be useful. “Suppose we modify my idea to incorporate the best aspects of your approach.” A collaborative approach usually takes longer than compromise, but often builds commitment and leads to a better solution.

Too frequently, leaders settle for compromise when collaboration is possible. Compromise is required only in the case of conflict about specific, discrete alternatives that cannot be modified.

Set Group Boundaries

Suppose you're faced with a situation that doesn't require a superior solution. Commitment to implement is critical, however, and you know you won't get commitment without participation. The involvement process recommends G2 (Resolve as Group).

In another situation, you do require a superior solution. Commitment to implement is critical, you won't get commitment without participation and you do have goal agreement. Once again, the involvement process suggests G2.

In these two situations, G2 is the only recommended leader behavior. In other situations, G2 may be the best choice of a number of recommended leader behaviors in order to meet individual or team development objectives.

However, to retain essential control and ensure success in a G2 meeting, you often need to establish boundaries. In other words, you need to define limits for the group, within which you relinquish control. These boundaries may relate to time, to group process or to an acceptable solution.

Time Limits and Ground Rules

Reaching a G2 conclusion usually takes longer than a C2 (Consult Group) conclusion. As leader, you may want to give the group a time limit. For instance, you may tell the group at the start of the meeting that if they have not agreed by 5 p.m., you will decide, based on their input. When you impose a time limit, let the group know why the deadline is necessary. If the issue is important to them, they'll resent an arbitrary time limit.

You may also want to set some ground rules about group process. This is particularly important with an inexperienced group. For example, you may insist that everybody has an opportunity to speak and that they consider objectives before discussing alternative solutions.

Acceptable Solutions

In many situations, you will want to set boundaries on acceptable solutions. Most boundaries are related to resources such as time and money. For example, any solution the group comes up with must cost less than \$10,000 and be implemented in the next six months.

In General

Setting group boundaries, whether related to time, group process, or an acceptable solution, should be clearly communicated by the leader to the group up-front. Tell your group not only what the limit is, but why you're suggesting it.

Beware of imposing too many boundaries; too many limitations will undermine commitment. Set boundaries only when they're really non-negotiable.

Use of Time

The involvement process usually recommends more than one leader behavior. The one you use will depend on time constraints and other objectives, such as individual development or team building.

Time Constraints

Participation takes time. The greater the degree of involvement, the more time it usually takes. However, to meet your deadline you have little to gain by implementing a poor solution or one lacking commitment. The involvement process ensures that you have enough participation for commitment and a superior solution, if required, before considering time constraints. If time is tight, select the least participative of the behaviors indicated by the Leadership Tree since this will probably be the most time efficient.

In an emergency, when time is of the essence, people are usually willing to commit without participation. For example, people usually follow the leader in an evacuation. As long as the leader has sufficient information, all is well.

Beware that “not enough time” can be used as a rationalization for behaving autocratically in situations where the leader lacks information or needs to build commitment through participation. The leader should consider whether there’s enough time to undo and remake a poor solution or one implemented without the commitment needed to succeed. Planning will ensure that you have sufficient time to involve others in finding a superior solution to which people are committed.

Organizations that want to increase participation need to develop a proactive—rather than reactive—approach for leaders to have the time participation requires.

Organizations that encourage participation should also encourage leaders to involve others when participation will make a difference, rather than involving everybody in every situation. Participation makes a difference when involving others will contribute to:

- A superior solution
- Commitment to the solution
- Developing the individuals involved
- Building a team

You must consider the time required for participation not only in terms of deadlines but also in terms of the hours people spend resolving an issue. Other important activities aren’t carried out when people spend time in meetings.

Development of Individuals

The opportunities for individual development increase with participation. A1 (Resolve Alone) and A2 (Question Individuals) provide little development of others. C1 (Consult Individuals) can provide individuals with information and a broader perspective. C1 may also lead to some improvement in problem solving and decision making skills.

C2 (Consult Group) and G2 (Resolve as Group) leader behaviors provide the greatest opportunity for development. When individuals interact as a group, they gain information and have opportunities to practice and improve communication skills. Individual group members can develop their problem solving and decision making skills. When people disagree about alternatives, group interaction allows them to learn from each other and to gain a broader perspective.

Individual development is more likely to occur when people are involved in resolving important, difficult issues. Participation when a superior solution is not required is less likely to promote learning.

Team Building

Effective teams result when time is spent together doing the following:

- Strongly identifying with organizational or work unit goals
- Clearly understanding individual roles and how they fit
- Honestly, directly and concisely communicating
- Confronting and resolving conflicts
- Building consensus

Obviously, C2 (Consult Group) and G2 (Resolve as Group) are the only leader behaviors that have potential for building teams. Team building will not occur automatically. The leader must work with the group to develop the characteristics listed above. This takes time and skill.

Build Consensus

In G2, the group works together to agree on the solution. Occasionally, the group is unanimous; each individual has reached the same conclusion. More often, agreement is reached by voting or by building consensus.

When the group votes, the solution with the most votes is selected. The majority rules. Voting is quick. Suppose, however, the group votes on three potential solutions. More than half the group may have voted against the solution selected. How committed will they be to implementing this solution?

Consensus means all group members agree to support one solution. The solution may or may not be each person's individual choice. Everybody, however, has had an opportunity to influence the group.

Building consensus can develop commitment, as each group member is actively involved in resolving the issue. However, achieving consensus takes time and skill.

Guidelines for Building Consensus

The following suggestions for building consensus incorporate skills that are discussed in other sections of the Managing Involvement text.

- Get group agreement on how the situation is defined. Ensure that everybody is working on the same concern.
- Agree on the process that will be used to resolve the issue.
- Clarify that there is goal agreement and make this visible for the group.
- Use questioning and active listening skills to seek information and opinions from each member of the group. Look for and examine differences of opinion.
- Confirm agreement often.
- Expose and resolve conflict.
- In resolving conflict, both compromise and collaboration can be used. Avoid frequent use of compromise, however, as this can undermine consensus.
- If agreement is reached quickly, be on guard. Take time to ensure that everyone supports the conclusion. Remember that silence does not necessarily mean agreement.

Delegation

We have been discussing the different ways a leader can involve others in successfully resolving a situation. Where does delegation fit in? We often hear that the best leaders, from the top of the organization to the first line, know how and when to delegate.

Delegation Defined

Leaders delegate whenever they ask somebody else, usually an employee or group of employees, to do something that falls within the leader's area of responsibility.

Whenever you delegate a task, you must give the other person or group both the responsibility to complete the task and the authority to do so. You have not given away your responsibility, however. Both you and the individual or group have full responsibility for the delegated task. That group or individual is now accountable to you.

Delegation and the Involvement Process

Delegation relates to the involvement process in one of two ways. Delegation to a group is a modification of G2, while delegation to an individual identifies a new leader.

When you ask someone else to resolve a situation, you are designating a new leader. This leader will have to consider who to involve and the nature of that involvement to ensure a superior solution and commitment to implement, if required. You may or may not require the new leader to report back on the conclusion reached.

You can delegate responsibility for resolving a situation to a group comprised of others who have the required information and whose commitment is needed. As the leader, you have decided who to involve and the nature of their involvement. You do not participate in the group, and may or may not require the group to report back on the conclusion reached. In this case, delegation is a modification of G2.

Why Delegate?

Leaders delegate to achieve results; they get more done that way. Delegation frees up time to deal with other concerns. Delegation also serves to develop individuals or, in the case of a group, to build teams. Delegation to a group maximizes participation and can thereby build commitment to implement. Delegation to an individual may gain the commitment of the new leader who in turn may need to involve others to build their commitment.

Guidelines for Delegation

Here are some suggestions for effective delegation, based on the involvement process.

- Discuss the need for a superior solution with the new leader or group, emphasizing why a superior solution is required. Establish must objectives or boundaries for an acceptable solution.

- Consider the information required to resolve the situation. Provide the new leader or group with information you have. When the situation is unstructured, discuss how best to obtain the missing information. Ensure that you have also delegated the authority needed to get the information required.

- When delegating to a new leader, discuss the need for commitment to implement and plan how best to build commitment, when required.

- Delegate only when there's goal agreement. Ensure that the new leader or group share the goals of the organization or work unit in this situation.

- When you anticipate conflict about alternatives, discuss with the individual or group how best to resolve disagreement.

- Delegate only when the individual or group have the basic skills required to resolve the situation.