

THE
PROFESSIONAL
ASSOCIATION
STRENGTHENING
PROJECT

MODULE 1

**Diversity and
Professional
Association
Strengthening**

survive & thrive

professional associations, private sector and global health scholars
saving mothers, newborns and children

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Diversity and Professional Association Strengthening

Professional association strengthening is about getting the best out of the individuals who make up the organisations. These individuals have specific and different identities that affect the way they take on responsibilities and behave in a group. The purpose of this module is to increase awareness of the effect of some of these personality traits that should be considered during the association strengthening process.

Objectives

- To increase awareness of the effect of some personality characteristics and traits (demographics) that can affect the growth and development of a professional association.
- To discuss and share ways to mitigate any possible negative effects of these diverse elements.

Introduction

Experience has demonstrated that there is no single model for strengthening professional associations because all activities need to be contextualised and customised to the particular needs and context of the association. On the other hand, consensus exists that strengthening professional associations involves ensuring that the organisation is member-led, sustainable, and has capacity to carry out a range of functions that enable it to contribute to the provision of health care in its home country.

Association Status and Situation

Associations are diverse and exist at different sizes and at different stages of development. In some countries, associations do not exist. In some, professionals are able to mobilise resources and develop interventions to strengthen

their associations. In some, the association has an equipped office and personnel. In some, the individuals who manage association affairs work full-time elsewhere and carry out association work during their spare time without personnel or financial support. In some, donor organisations may provide support. Because of this reality, working with these associations will require a variety of approaches.

The variety of strategies needed to mobilise resources is demonstrated in the following example. A nongovernmental organisation (NGO) wished to work with the midwives of that country, but there was no formal midwifery association, so the NGO used its resources to create one. The new association served as focal point for the NGO, which was working to strengthen midwifery education in that country. The NGO provided finances and hired experienced staff to create and support the association during the life of the project. Within 12 months, the association had an office, a staff, a vibrant website, and all the foundations of an organisation. However, at the end the project, the NGO had no more resources to support the association, and it unfortunately died a natural death.

In order to avoid this situation, professional groups that wish to start associations should identify ways to leverage diverse resources in the following ways:

- Ensure that sustainability measures are built into any process used to strengthen or create an association.
- Take advantage of any existing resources to build strong leadership capacity during implementation and before the end of the project.
- Assist the association to identify and mobilise diverse resources and enhance communication capacity to ensure sustainability.
- Create diverse projects run by the association that continue after end of project. In Sierra Leone, a

twinning relationship between 2 associations was used to ensure sustainability of a midwives' association after the end of project.

Human Diversity

Organisations are as good as the people who make them, and these people give an organisation its culture, ie, its shared values, beliefs, customs, traditions, and meanings. It is important to acknowledge this fact when strengthening or creating a professional association.

EXAMPLE

The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) established a twinning relationship between two associations, one from a high income region and another from a low income region. According to the culture of the high income region, individuals should say exactly what they think and need and what they expect from their colleagues. According to the culture of the low income region, this was impolite. Instead, an individual may suggest displeasure but should go with the flow until others realise the course of action is not working.

RESULT: Continued frustration occurred for both groups. Some participants felt that others were not always honest and open. Some participants felt that others were being pushy and insensitive to their needs; the others should have noted from their implied response that the process was not going according to their preference.

SOLUTION: An ICM staff member acted as a go-between to clarify issues and enlighten members of both groups in the same room; they were able to see the effect that their different cultures were having on their processes.

With the current movement in populations, it is important that professional associations are made up of individuals from different cultures. By virtue of being human, there is bound to be diversity, and this needs to be recognised.

Professional Associations as Members of Society

Organisations exist in societies and share some of the idiosyncrasies of those societies. The association's fabric is

made up of diverse individuals who share the same beliefs and value systems the society within which they exist, and these are likely to be reflected in the professional body. Some of these values and beliefs create differences (diversity) that can be harnessed (leveraged) for the effective function of the professional association, or they may need to be addressed to resolve possible conflict.

Gender

Gender refers to the role a society allocates or expects because an individual is male or female. Some people believe that women and men think and see the world differently. In some societies, women are said to underestimate their potential and the relevance of their contributions. It is important to recognise that gender roles refer to an implied understanding in a society that may or may not coincide with reality. With increasing globalisation and more equal opportunities for boys and girls, gender roles are progressively changing.

In some societies men and women are accorded different status. This becomes significant when a professional group is predominantly male or female. In some countries, predominantly male professional associations enjoy higher status and command more societal respect than those that are predominantly female.

This discrepancy can be addressed in the following ways:

- When strengthening a professional association, work with a mixed team based on the expertise, capabilities, and performance of individuals rather than their genders.
- Work to gain full insights into gender perceptions and rise above gender norms that are not beneficial to growth and development of the association. Better still, use these perceptions to the association's advantage (ie, leverage this diversity). For example, a midwives association and an obstetrics and gynaecology society can work together on policy issues and present a united front to policy makers. This takes advantage of the gender distribution between obstetricians and midwives. Associations of nurses, paediatricians, and physicians (whatever combination is appropriate at the time) can work together to affect changes in policy.
- If an association plans to meet ministry officials

and policy makers in a country in which the status of women is low, it is prudent to send a mixed group of representatives.

In some countries, men and women are still not respected equally even though expertise for a job should be evaluated irrespective of gender.

Power, Power Distribution and Influence

Societal norms affect who is bestowed with power, authority, and influence. This unwritten understanding creates a certain hierarchy and formal and informal patterns of power and decision making. Sometimes this hierarchy is reflected in the professional group. For example, in midwifery programs in Zimbabwe, male students constitute 10% of the student body, and male students are generally chosen as group leaders, despite the fact that they represent the minority. In Zimbabwe, men are perceived as leaders with power who can easily influence decisions; women are perceived as followers with less power and their voices are not always heard when decisions are being made. It is important to be aware of these cultural differences.

When working to strengthen the professional association,

- Recognise that the world has changed and continues to do so.
- Individuals should not be put in positions and given responsibilities based only on their genders. It is the professionals' responsibility to demonstrate that intellect and leadership capacity are independent of gender. Choose the person with the right capacity and personality for the right position.

Activity: Power and Distribution

A professional group could go through the following exercise while allocating positions and responsibilities in an association.

Power and Distribution Exercise	
Objective of Exercise	To assist the association to choose the <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Right personality for the right position ■ The right expertise for the right job ■ The right level of education for the right responsibility
Lead Person	The Association President, if there is one or a facilitator identified by the association
Setting	During a meeting
Activity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a list of the roles and responsibilities that need to be allocated to individuals. 2. Divide participants into groups of five or six. The groups should not be too big to allow equal participation. 3. Each group should answer the following questions for each role: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — What expertise is required to ensure effective delivery in this role? — What personality traits would enhance performance in this role? For example, do we need a quiet reserved person or an extrovert? — What will be the measure of effectiveness? — Who would best fill in this role? (fill in the name) — What is the individual's track record, if any? <p>When participants have a name of an individual, they should all agree that the individual named has either all or at least 2 of the 3 criteria above.</p> 4. Groups come together and share their ideas. Named persons leave the room. The facilitator works with the rest of the group to confirm/validate the group's decisions. The one most supported for each role is then identified. 5. Facilitator should help the groups to beware of charisma versus effectiveness.

- Identify levers of influence within the organisation and facilitate effective distribution of responsibility, power, and authority in a manner that encourages effective function of the professional association and its ability to influence on policy decisions.

Class

A professional association is usually a non-profit organisation seeking to further the interests of individuals within a profession and the interests of the public. The association may be perceived as a group of people in a learned occupation whose objective is to maintain control or oversight of the legitimate practice of the occupation. How *learned* a professional group is as perceived by society accords it class and affects how well and how easily accepted it is. Health care professionals have received different levels of education, and they are given respect according to how well educated or learned they are perceived to be. The members of a professional group must be aware of their positions in society, and this small exercise can help them. During a meeting, the members answer and discuss the following questions:

- What is the perception of our professional group within this society? Answers must be validated by examples.
- What is it we must do in order to fulfil our professional roles effectively and earn the respect of members of this society? How can we achieve the goal of being perceived as valuable to society?

An honest and candid discussion will inevitably touch on the provision of high quality, respectful, and culturally sensitive care. This professional introspection is an important activity to strengthen professional associations.

Professional Level, Age, and Specialisation

In most professions, some individuals have long years of experience and have furthered their educations and basic qualifications. For example, in a midwives association, there are midwife teachers, midwife researchers, and midwives with advanced educational preparation (Masters and PhD). The same occurs in nursing and medicine. The professional group tends to accord these individuals with higher status and tends to choose them for leadership positions.

However, additional education is not an absolute determinant of leadership effectiveness, nor is technical performance, and individuals should not be placed in positions for which they are not suited. When creating an organisation,

professional groups must identify individuals with leadership potential through the exercise Spotting a Leader (see Table 2) and use their findings to identify suitable individuals for leadership positions.

EXAMPLES

In one country in Central Asia, work was being done to create and strengthen a professional association. Because a post-Soviet culture was still prevalent, only older professionals were elected to executive positions. The president of the association was the oldest member of the group. The drawback of this choice was that this individual was not computer agile and had not kept up to date with clinical or professional developments. Younger, less experienced individuals with more current knowledge and higher qualifications felt slighted and would not contribute to the process.

In another setting, in a country in Africa, a professional association identified the need to strengthen the organisation and felt that leadership structure was weak. The leader was the only individual with a doctoral degree who had been elected into the presidency. Unfortunately, the president was more interested in research and private consultancies than leading the profession even though the rest of the group looked to this individual to take the lead.

SOLUTION: In such situations, all effort needs to be made to ensure that leadership consists of individuals with mixed ages, specialisations, and educational levels. That way, there is likely to be a balance among diverse factors.

Perception of Policy Makers

Policy makers may perceive professional associations as organisations acting to maintain their own privileged and powerful positions. At worst, associations may be perceived as pressure groups or trade unions that do not necessarily have the interests of the government and the population at heart. This perception needs to be managed. At times, some of the professionals believe that the association should act as a trade union, and their attitudes may be confrontational rather than collaborative. Practitioners need to assure members and policy makers that the association is focused

on its members and the effective delivery of care to the population. Therefore, when strengthening a professional association,

- Keep the authorities informed of the activities of the association,
- Invite policy makers to relevant meetings,
- Visit the policy makers and inform them of any decisions that might affect national policy,
- Be the informant of the ministry, and keep the ministry up to date with new approaches and technologies in care provision,
- Be collaborative and supportive to government efforts, not confrontational, and
- Ensure the strategic plan of the association feeds into the national strategy (road map) for the provision of care to the population served by the professional group.

Individual Issues

Some individual traits affect interactions among professionals and contribute to the effectiveness of the organisation positively or negatively. Few personality traits are neutral; most tend to be toxic and need to be managed. When electing leaders and sharing responsibilities in a professional association, individuals tend to look for performance, level of education, technical expertise, and sometimes friends. There are risks involved in this. Table 1 provides a guide for identifying toxic traits in the association based on the understanding that members know each other reasonably well.

Technical Expertise

In most professional organisations, the tendency is to give technical efficiency more prominence than leadership. This accounts for some of the weaknesses in leadership that tend to be common in professional associations and in turn lead to their inability to affect policy. Often, professional associations do not have the capacity to engage policy makers at a policy or political level. Association leaders need a clear understanding of the country's bureaucracy, and this insight does not always come as first nature to individuals with technical expertise. The association should take advantage of individuals who have relationships with policy makers and use them to scan the horizon and ensure that the association is always aware of what issues are under discussion. The association can then take steps to contribute.

Association Leadership— A Word of Caution

When forming a new association or strengthening an existing one, ensure that the leadership team consists of individuals with the potential to be politically astute and the confidence to engage in policy dialogue and political decision making. To identify a leader, look for confidence, consistency, clarity in communication, integrity, and experience in her/his specific field, including adequate knowledge of the health care system in the target country. It may be difficult to find someone with all these characteristics, therefore, the association needs to make a conscious effort to develop leadership capacity from within. Get external experts to help if necessary or leverage those who have the required expertise, even if they are not members of the profession, until the association is fully developed with strong individuals to take the lead.

Table 1. Toxic Personality Traits

Trait	Description	What to do
Founding Member Syndrome	Individuals who found organisations usually work very hard to get them established. They become attached and passionate and cannot perceive that others can do as good a job as they do. As a result, they find it difficult to share power and responsibility with others, usually younger individuals who joined when the organisation was already in full swing. The founders' hearts ache when they see these much younger professionals, whom they perceive as not having enough knowledge and information about how the organisations started, vying for power or coming up with new ideas that are sometimes perceived as radical. This can be further compounded by age and generational differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reduce fear among the founding members by utilising ex-executive members as board members, advisors, or as trustees so that their experience is not lost and they do not feel forgotten. ■ Identify potential leaders and develop them. Build leadership capacity through continuing professional development. ■ Develop a succession plan and select the right individuals to head the association with the founding members' support.
What's In It For Me Syndrome	Some professionals will only join the association if there is a clear benefit for them.	<p>While creating a professional association</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Be clear as to why the group needs an association. ■ Share the values and functions of the association with the members and prospective members so that they become shared values at the onset of creating or strengthening the association. That way the foundation of unity in the association is established.
Know It Alls	Watch out for arrogant individuals whose talents may be terrific but who fail to contribute. Know It Alls will not hesitate to act arrogantly in the association once elected to a position of responsibility and are likely to act as if they know better than everyone else.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Institutionalise reflection and continuous learning to rise above the issues that have potential to create problems. Even chronologically mature members will learn. ■ Value everyone's perspective when making strategic choices ■ Foster communication among all involved so that there is a growing sense of belonging and identity among members, and no one person who knows it all.
Schemers	Schemers manipulate situations in their favor. Members must try to find out what the schemer's biggest challenge is when working with others. Schemers usually bring down people with them or get others into trouble by association. Members should be wary of schemers who seem to have a strong negative influence on other people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Encourage a questioning behaviour among members. ■ Expose the schemers through paranoid vigilance, ie, be on the lookout for schemes and talk about them before they become problems. Some people may also notice them but are afraid to comment. ■ Manage discussions to avoid hurtful or spiteful speech.
Gossip Kings and Queen	Most human relations within an organization are shot down by gossip. It may not be possible to identify this unless you have known the person for a while, but it is necessary to watch out for individuals who spread rumors for their own entertainment. Avoid people who make serious decisions based on hearsay.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Name the elephant in the room.* If during a meeting you have a feeling that there are underlying currents due to some gossip mongering, bring the issues out in the open as tactfully as possible to take away their sting and the excitement of gossip.

Continued

Table 1. Toxic Personality Traits (continued)

Trait	Description	What to do
Tattlers	Tattlers can be quiet, even charming. They are often very friendly. They gather information quietly and wait. When they feel the time is right, or if they are just angry, they will tell supervisors about bad behavior they have observed. Tattlers are usually very opinionated about people and behaviors that don't have a direct effect on their lives. These individuals do not make good leaders or individuals who hold responsible positions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The best way to deal with tattlers is to give them nothing to tattle about. ■ Value independent judgement.
Blamers	It doesn't take long to spot a blamer. When things go wrong, they usually have a good excuse about someone else's failings. The problem with blamers is that they use scapegoats when no one is around to defend against accusations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Avoid putting such persons in leadership positions or any positions at all. ■ Share responsibility for the association's future. This means individual members should take ownership of the entire organisation ■ Share the association's vision effectively by indicating the role of all members and how they benefit if things work well. That way, members are encouraged to look beyond their individual needs and wants and will desist from blaming others when things do not go well.

Note. *The elephant in the room is a problem known to everyone but not discussed publicly because it is embarrassing or considered not politically correct. Such issues remain hidden, create an undercurrent to conversations and activities, and cause problems that people are not willing to address openly. Instead they discuss the issue in offices or during tea and lunch breaks before and after the meeting and usually in small cliques. This situation will progressively divide the whole organisation and render it ineffective.

Adapted from Hallaran M. How to spot a troublemaker during your hiring interview www.articlesbase.com/outourcing-articles/how-to-spot-a-troublemaker-during-your-hiring-interview-5062567.html. Published July 25, 2011. Accessed April 5, 2016. Used with permission of Articlesbase.

Leadership Development

Effective leadership is the tool with which to leverage diversity, ie, to use the differences among people and situations to the advantage during professional association strengthening. Strong leaders identify the follies and foibles of human beings, address them effectively, and harnesses stray energy and put it to good use. Sociologists claim that individuals are divided into three groups: leaders 10%, trouble makers 10%, and followers 80%! This means that if an association elects a trouble maker as a leader, 80% of its members will follow a trouble maker. If the association elects a person with positive leadership potential, then it is likely that 90% of its members will be effectively led. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to identify individuals with the potential to effectively lead the association. The spider diagram below shows what to look for when identifying leaders.

The guidelines below can be used to spot individuals with leadership potential. These individuals may need to be supported to actualise that potential. The best results are achieved if the observation is made in a routine environment. If what is going on is boring, the contrast between those who have leadership potential and those who don't is often stark. For more information on leadership development, refer to Module 6.

Challenges in Professional Association Strengthening

There are common challenges to strengthening professional associations. With new organisations, this may include lack of experience, lack of finance, lack of powerful contacts, etc. There are also issues of unused power and influence in which the association does not recognise the need to engage on policy and political levels and therefore

Figure 1. Characteristics of a Good Leader



Source: https://how2fangirl.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/leader_good.jpg

Table 2. Spotting a Leader

Trait	Explanation
1. Engagement (screens vs. people)	<i>Managers look at screens; leaders engage with people.</i> Check out who is engaging with people most. Talk to them. Leaders will focus on you and not a laptop or some other device. Conversely, if the association is looking for a manager, then choose from those people who switch to looking at screens during the meeting. They are probably looking for rules and procedures.
2. Reaction to Failure	<i>Leaders don't whine, they let it go.</i> Leave individuals who complain all the time. They are not good as leaders.
3. Affection and Attention Seeking Behaviour	<i>"Do you see me?"</i> is fine; <i>"LOOK AT ME!!!"</i> is not. Leaders do not call attention to themselves by the use of over-studied body language, convoluted verbal gymnastics, or outrageous clothing. Leaders are comfortable as themselves and are constantly sharing ideas without necessarily calling attention to themselves. They appear secure in their current positions.
4. Composure	<i>Leaders are composed.</i> If after a short while in a meeting an individual starts getting restless, then this person is not a leader. Leaders remain cool, calm, and collected throughout a meeting.
5. Focus	Most individuals can start an all-day meeting engaged and alert. The indication that an individual might be leadership material is the degree to which he/she is engaged and alert after a long meeting, especially when the carbohydrate load of lunchtime and possibly repetitive work combine for a narcoleptic effect. Assuming the subject is important, how focused and creative is the individual when things get really tiring at the end of the day?

Note. Adapted from Les McKeown; President CEO in Predictable Success. The Synergist: How to Lead Your Team to Predictable Success" which provides a comprehensive model for developing yourself or others as an exceptional, world class leader. (July 2013)

does not use technical knowledge as a power base to change policy. This could be due to lack of expertise. Some professional groups have never considered taking active steps to strengthen their associations. Other organizations may recognize this need but do not know how to start.

This takes us to the question, *What is a strong professional organisation?* A strong professional association is one that is well governed; effectively organized; with a representative membership; and excellent relationships/networks with other organisations, the ministries, especially the Ministry of Health, women, and families. The ICM Member Association Capacity Assessment Tool (MACAT) provides a means for the association to assess itself.¹ This assessment can be done with or without external support.

Summary

This introductory module provides information to support the process of strengthening professional associations. It discusses elements of diversity and how they may affect processes and procedures and influence human behaviour, which in turn affects the organisation. Keeping some of these factors in mind will enable individuals to better interact with each other. Professional groups embarking on strengthening their associations will benefit from reading this module before they start their actual work.

Self-assessment with the MACAT can be used to identify areas that need strengthening and to prioritise interventions.

Activity: Self-Assessment

Self-assessment provides information with which to strengthen an association and an opportunity to bring people together to take a close look at their organisation. The issues identified and the remedies required become shared.

Steps for Self-Assessment	
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To assess the capacity of the association ■ To identify areas that need to be addressed ■ To determine the resources required to fill in identified gaps ■ To prioritise needs ■ To develop a strategic plan
Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Print out a few copies of the ICM MACAT or a similar tool known to the professionals. ■ Call a meeting and explain the exercise. ■ Divide the meeting delegates into groups and give each group a copy of the assessment tool. ■ Explain the guidelines for filling in the tool. ■ Allow time for each group to fill in the tool. ■ Groups present their responses. ■ Discuss conflicting responses until the house agrees on a common response. The meeting will end up with one set of agreed responses for every item. ■ Highlight the gaps and work with the group to prioritise them. ■ Identify the resources required to fill each gap and from where those resources will come. ■ Develop a strategic plan (this is a full day process of its own). ■ Identify a small working group to crystallise the report and the plan and present to the members at the next meeting. This forms the basis of any interventions and the timing involved.
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This process can be followed during a series of meetings rather than in just one day.

REFERENCES

1. International Confederation of Midwives. Member association capacity assessment tool. www.internationalmidwives.org/what-we-do/association-core-documents/macat.html. Accessed April 5, 2016.