

Palme Academy Introductory Course: **Module 2**

**HOW TO RUN AND REPRESENT A PARTY**

**HOLDING**

**ELECTIONS**

**AND REACHING**

**DECISIONS**

Internal democratic processes, representation and reconciliation

# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
What is a political party?	4
What kind of party does a social democratic party aim to be?	4
But how do you do that?	4
An introductory course in forming a party	5
Module 2 Holding Elections and Reaching Decisions	6
<b>Party democracy and internal democratic processes</b>	<b>8</b>
Some basic principles	9
<b>The party's decision-making processes and the need for a clear decision-making structure</b>	<b>11</b>
Organisational decision-making levels and their relationships	12
National Conference	12
The members and the local level	13
The regional decision-making level	14
National decision-making level	16
The party and its representatives in elected assemblies	18
<i>Discussion questions</i>	23
<b>The central role of meetings and ballots</b>	<b>19</b>
The need for a clear and democratic order of business	19
Key meetings in party decision-making processes	22
Branch General Meetings	23
Annual General Meeting	26
<i>Discussion questions</i>	34
<b>Executives and the work of an Executive</b>	<b>27</b>
Team work with clear roles	28
The role and tasks of the Executive	30
<i>Discussion questions</i>	32

## **Election of representatives – and the need for representativeness** **33**

Five basic principles	34
Trust of the members	34
What's best for the party as a whole	34
Freedom that comes with accountability and is based on trust	34
Changes in the leadership are natural	34
Election of representatives	35
Nominating Committees and their role	35
The importance of representativeness	37
Factors to include	37
<i>Discussion questions</i>	40

## **Organisational culture and democratic leadership** **41**

What is an organisational culture?	42
Our organisational culture	42
Fundamental values rule	43
Methods for working with the organisational culture	43
A democratic leadership	46
<i>Discussion questions</i>	48

Olof Palme International Center, Stockholm 2020

Text: Jesper Bengtsson & Thomas Carlhed

Translation: Katherine Stuart

All content is protected by Swedish copyright law. The text may be reproduced, transmitted, displayed, published, or broadcast in any medium provided that the Olof Palme International Center and the authors are acknowledged. However, no photographs may be reproduced, transmitted, displayed, published, or broadcast in any medium.

Please contact us at the Olof Palme International Center if you use this module as the basis for a course or study circle, or if you have suggestions for sections or content that you think future editions of the module could include: [info@palmecenter.se](mailto:info@palmecenter.se).



# Introduction

## What is a political party?

In most democratic political systems in the world, political parties play a crucial role in the way in which democracy functions. It is political parties that stand for election, who provide lists of candidates, and who write policy platforms for voters to consider. It is political parties that legislate and make decisions that affect all citizens. It is political parties that can be held accountable for their decisions and whose power can be taken away in free and fair elections.

Political parties function as a link between citizens and political power. They organise people so that they can have a role in making political decisions. They can bring together voters, make them members, educate them on social issues, and mobilise them to make their own voices heard. When political parties function well, they are not only involved in creating policy in parliaments or running campaigns, they also help to make political and democratic influence a living reality for more people. They become a tool for people to influence social development, and to take control over their own lives.

### What kind of party does a social democratic party aim to be?

There are many different types of models for political parties. If you want to learn more about how to form and develop a party, you will first need to define what party model you intend to use. Is it a party that consists mainly of a group of elected politicians representing various interest groups? Is it a party controlled from the top down – termed a cadre party? Or is it perhaps a populist party centred around a strong leader, with supporters rather than full members in the party's base?

In this course material, we of course assume that a social democratic party is basically and ought to be a popular movement party where the power in the party derives from its members and moves upwards through its organisation. It needs an inclusive and democratic way of working that features internal democracy, representativeness, and transparency.

The basis of such a party is the democratic grass roots movement and substantial popular participation. It is a party that brings together people of flesh and blood, who have commitment and a common vision of how our society should function and develop. In this sense, there is no

difference between a popular movement party and other popular movements. People join forces to play football or put on plays in a theatre group, to form a cooperative, or to learn to sew or weave. Those who want to be involved in changing the conditions under which people live in a broader sense become active in a political party. That is the foundation of a popular movement party.

The organisational focus of such a party is on developing strong local structures with a lot of active members. It is based on the idea that parties in a democracy should not only play an important role in parliaments but also in the surrounding community and civil society. Political parties, especially if they are also in power, are often seen as representatives of parliament or the government and not as representatives of people in everyday life. In order to avoid this situation, parties must create broad, inclusive organisations with democratic structures and ensure that they work in a way that is visible and which makes a difference in people's everyday lives.

### *But how do you do that?*

Democratic parties in different parts of the world can learn a lot from each other's experiences and practices.

This introductory course and its modules focus on how a party can strengthen its organisational and political capacity to become a strong and democratic party with active members and inclusive structures and activities. The strength of a party depends to a large extent on how democratic it is and how well the organisation functions. This requires organisational structures and ways of working that function well, and a culture of openness to people actively sharing in and participating in the political work of the party. A strong democratic party that is confident in itself encourages debate, active participation and criticism, and self-criticism.



## An introductory course in forming a party

This course is intended to provide an introduction to and an overview of how to form, organise, develop, and represent a democratic popular movement party – from the top down and the bottom up.

Its target group is leaders and active members of social democratic parties. You might be leaders in many different areas at the national, regional, or local level. This course emphasises the local level, however, since the local level forms the base of a social democratic popular movement party, and is the level that involves the most people. The material for this course is also useful for active members who are not leaders, in which case it can be used for self-study or as part of local member courses.

### A six-module course

The course is divided into six self-contained modules. Each module has its own course material, which is intended to be used for two or three meetings of leaders and others in the party in the form of a study circle to discuss the questions and ideas that the module raises. But the number of meetings to cover each module is flexible. One

meeting per module is also an option, although you will then need to pick out which of the topics and questions you are going to discuss, as you will probably not have time to cover everything. As a participant, you can of course choose to take the entire course or to focus specifically on one of its modules.

### The six modules in this introductory course are:

#### Module 1

Forming and Structuring a party

#### Module 2

Holding Elections and Reaching Decisions

#### Module 3

Formulating Policy and Leading the Way

#### Module 4

Reaching Out and Connecting

#### Module 5

Growing and Consolidating

#### Module 6

Representing and Governing

## Module 2 – Holding Elections and Reaching Decisions

This module deals with questions that are central to a political party. Questions that can give the members a natural place, the party leadership its legitimacy, and which show that conflicts and difference of opinion can be resolved in a way that makes the party stronger, not weaker.

Questions related to democratic parties being able to work at a fundamental level, to deliver and to create order, the peace of mind that is needed to be able to work effectively, and stability.

It is about the party's internal democratic processes. How the party chooses representatives and leaders. How to work in concrete terms to reconcile and reach democratic and legitimate decisions.

Well-functioning internal democracy lifts a party. It makes the party stronger, more durable, and more viable. It is what makes the party ultimately able to meet the

electorate with credibility and energy and demand democracy, the rule of law, and equality in the society as a whole.

The goal of this module is to increase your knowledge of these questions so that you are able to participate in developing the party's activities and apply internal democracy within the party in which you are active.

### This module is divided into six parts:

- 1 Party democracy and internal democratic processes – some overall principles
- 2 The party's decision-making processes – the need for a clear decision-making structure
- 3 The role of meetings and voting – the need for a clear agenda for meetings and a democratic way of working
- 4 Executives and their work – the need for a structured set of responsibilities and ways of working
- 5 Election of representatives – the need for good representativeness
- 6 The importance of the organisational culture and a democratic leadership



The Swedish Social Democrats' Party Chair Stefan Löfven with Party Secretary Lena Rådström Baastad, Minister of Finance Magdalena Andersson and members of the Swedish Social Democratic Youth Union.



## BASED ON THE SWEDISH EXPERIENCE

This course is based on the experiences and organisation of social democracy in Sweden. In other words, it is not meant to be a blueprint. The circumstances for political parties are different in different parts of the world. Economic development will have progressed to different levels. The political conflict lines will be different. In some countries, ethnic conflict lines are very apparent. In others, class conflicts are the most predominant. In some countries, the political process is prejudiced by an earlier or ongoing struggle for freedom. In a country without a long tradition of a multi-party system, or in a relatively young democracy, the challenges are different from those in countries where democratic elections have been held over a long period of time. As a participant in this course, you may utilise the experiences of Sweden's social democratic movement and the ways it is organised. These experiences can then be applied to your own environment and adapted to your own experiences and circumstances.

That said, we would like to emphasise that the experiences of social democracy in Sweden can be of interest to study in other parts of the world. Sweden's Social Democratic Party has long experience of winning elections and being in government, always by virtue of being the biggest party. The membership of Sweden's Social Democratic Party has been consistently large. The party has had regional and local branches throughout the country for a

long time and, in collaboration with other parts of civil society, has often been able to dominate the political agenda. A brief explanation for this strong position is that the party has been successful in bringing together large groups in society around a common, future-focused and solidarity-based social narrative, and through having a consistent goal to grow and change in pace with societal development.

This does not mean that there are no challenges left for social democracy in Sweden. On the contrary. In recent decades, the labour market has changed dramatically. Traditional working-class occupations have become fewer. After several decades of neoliberalism, nationalism and more traditional values have become a new factor in politics, and have increased support for conservative parties. At the same time, strongly growing individualism, particularly in the larger cities, continues to attract voters to more liberal parties. More and more citizens are also choosing alternative forms of political engagement in single-issue organisations (e.g. the environment, feminism or migration). It is more difficult to get people to get involved in party politics, to sit on an Executive, and to take on time-consuming official roles. These are the challenges facing many political parties today.

In short, a party must always be flexible and ready to innovate in line with societal development. We are all part of an ongoing learning process. This is why it is

so enjoyable and challenging to be part of a political party.

### Things to bear in mind

How a party is organised at different levels in the society varies from country to country. In some cases there may be more levels; and in others, there may be fewer. This module presents the models for the structure of the Swedish Social Democratic Party's organisation. So you will find that there may be differences in the structure of the party organisation in your country. If you do not recognise your party's model in this module, then you should try to match the levels described here to your party's structure and explain why your party is organised in this way. The important thing here is to understand how the party organisation's fundamental decision-making levels are linked to and function in tandem with the society in which it operates, and internally with the organisational levels in the party.

There may also be differences in the local branch. The local branch is the party's base and every party member must belong to a local branch. In the Swedish Social Democratic Party, this level is called the *arbetarekommun*, and corresponds to one of Sweden's 290 local government areas (municipalities). One local branch of the party per LGA/municipality. There may also be underlying social democratic associations and clubs that together form the local branch. ■

## FACTS

### THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS IN SWEDEN

The Swedish Social Democratic Party was formed in 1889 as part of a broader popular movement and organising process with the aim of demanding political and economic rights for workers. The party's founders included trade union organisations who believed that the labour movement needed a voice in parliament. In the first few years, it was about demanding democracy, universal suffrage, and better social conditions for workers. The party formed its first government in 1920 and has since then been in government for a total of over 70 years. During these years, the party's main project has been to develop, and further develop, within the framework

of 'the Swedish model' – a modern welfare state aimed at increasing citizens' equality, social security and freedom. For a long time, there were only five parties in Sweden's *Riksdag* (national parliament) and the Social Democrats often received over 40 per cent of the votes in elections. Today there are more parties and the Social Democrats Party has lost some of its broad support, and often has to form coalitions with other parties in order to be able to govern.

**90,000 members**  
**290 local branches**  
**26 regional organisations**

The party currently has about 90,000 members who are organised in 290 local branches (*Arbetarekommuner*). Under these are a large number of associations and clubs, in residential areas and city districts in particular, which together with the local branch make up the basic organisation of the party. The local branches are in turn organised into 26 regional organisations called Party Districts (*Partidistrikt*). The party is classed as a mass-based party and its organisation is based on federal principles, where the regional organisations together constitute the party nationally, with the National Conference as the highest decision-making body. ■



# Party democracy and internal democratic processes

Imagine that you have just recently become a member of the party. You have seen the party's policy platform and like what it stands for. You sympathise with its vision for the future. You may have attended some meetings to gain an understanding of how things work in the party. What questions do you ask at this point?

You are probably wondering what you need to do to take the next step and become more active and engaged in the party. And then you might ask: How can I make a difference? What should I do so that my own views will have a greater impact? And how do I go about standing for election as a candidate and how do I succeed in getting a leadership role in the party?

All of this can feel quite complex and difficult to grasp for new members, and sometimes it can be just as complex for those who have been active in the local branch for some time. And it is indicative of the need for clear, transparent democratic processes for making decisions and choosing the leaders of the party.

It is inevitable that there will be informal structures in a party. Conversations and debates go on all the time as active members and elected representatives come up with ideas and formulate strategies. Networks develop between people. If you try to formalise this, you will suffocate a great deal of the creativity in an organisation. But there are also risks associated with decision-making that is too informal. Networks easily arise, often made up of men

in decision-making roles, who agree on the decisions to be made in their own small circle. This cannot be how decisions are made in a democratic party. This is precisely why formal internal democracy and the party's decision-making structure must be transparent and efficient. When decisions need to be made, a clear, transparent, and comprehensible set of rules must be followed so that old and new members alike are able to grasp how they can participate and have an influence.

This also creates clarity and legitimacy for the decisions that are made, and reduces the risk of misunderstandings and ambiguities, which in turn could lead to internal conflicts. Methods and rules that might be experienced as formalistic thus actually help to increase the impact and cohesion of a party. They are also a barrier to the abuse of power.

In the following chapters, we will review a number of these methods and rules. However, before we get into the detail, we want to highlight some basic factors and principles that affect how the internal democracy of a party functions at heart.



# Some basic principles

## Members' influence

Membership is key to all broad-based, democratic parties and it is important for the party culture that all members feel that they are equally important. Many members join because they want to support a party and help make it stronger and to ensure that the day-to-day work of the party flows smoothly. These members are as important as those who take on the weightier official roles. Fundamental to a democratic party's decision-making processes is one member, one vote. This means that all members must have the right to participate in making joint decisions about the party's policies and development. At decision-making members meetings and in member ballots, all members' votes are to be equal. This also means that all members are to have the right to post candidates for the party's leadership and all members are entitled to stand for election for an official role.

The leadership of a party – at its national, regional, or local level – has the trust of its members and thus is also given the freedom to act within the framework of the role they have been given. However, it is also important that the members are regularly consulted in the policy process – that is, between Annual General Meetings (AGMs), which might also be called annual meetings, and the National Conferences at which the party leaders are elected. A democratic party with popular support ought to ensure that it encourages a continuous, ongoing discussion about the party's policies and choices in terms of direction. This ought to be a feature of the entire organisation and its decision-making structure. As we have seen, this kind of approach also requires transparency and openness throughout the organisation and a leadership that is truly prepared to listen.

## Responsible leaders – and members

Anyone who joins a party does so voluntarily. How much anyone wants to get involved in the party and whether they want to take on an official role on executives or the like is also voluntary. Anyone who takes on such a role must always bear in mind that as an elected representative, they are acting on behalf of the organisation. When they make statements and pursue a policy line, they do so not as an individual but as a representative of the members. This calls for open and transparent leadership. There ought to be an ongoing dialogue between the elected representative and those who elected the person to that role. As an elected representative, you must always be clear about what decisions you participate in making, and what your reasons are.

The members must in turn understand that there are situations where elected representatives must act without being able to consult all instances of the party.



Modern politics often demands speed. That is precisely why transparency is so crucial. It must be possible to explain and justify decisions even when they were made quickly and were difficult to make.

## Representativeness

Societies are always made up of a multifaceted fabric of individuals, groups, communities, and collective identities. These may include everything from social class and ethnicity, to gender and sexual orientation. Sometimes parties and movements are created because they want representation for these identities. The labour movement was this kind of movement initially – it had the ambition of giving the working class a voice in public life. Since then, that ambition has broadened. Today, the Social Democrats want to give a voice to more groups – young people, women, and marginalised groups. It wants to be an even broader mass-based party working for equality, freedom, and solidarity. It is important that this aim is also reflected in those who represent the party externally. First and foremost, this is about all people having the same right to make their voice heard and to feel that they are represented in politics. But it is also about how difficult it is for a party that is controlled by representatives of only one group in society – whether it be men, an ethnic group, people of a certain age, or people from only one part of the country – to be the broad-based popular party that the Social Democrats want to be.

## Collective leadership

When people think of a party, they also often think of the party's leader. Or perhaps the Chair of the local or regional party organisation. That is inevitable. The Chair is the person who is most often the external spokesperson for the party. However, anyone sitting on an Executive has a leader's responsibility for the entire organisation.

Each and every one has been elected to their role. This makes their responsibility a collective one. It means that the decisions made are the decisions of the entire Executive, and all members of the Executive are entrusted with communicating the messages and activities that are decided in the Executive.

There are several reasons for this. At the very least, it is about being active as a member of an Executive. You need to be informed about the issues, involved in the discussions, and make conscious choices. If something is not going as planned, if it goes wrong or fails, it cannot be said that it was the fault of any individual member of the Executive. Anyone who is called on to perform a task or represent the Executive on any matter should also feel that the entire Executive is behind them.

### **Respect for jointly made decisions**

The fact that the party has a federated structure means that decision-making is bottom-up in the organisation. This is important for member democracy. But there should not be too great differences between the different levels of the party when it comes to messages, policy positions or the party's profile. The voters should be able to recognise themselves in the party in whatever context they encounter it. A party is healthiest if it remains open to free debate and criticism, while also finding a form that does not make the party appear too fragmented. Both the members and the leaders of the party must respect the party's rules, joint decisions, and ways of functioning.

### **Politics – where trust is paramount**

Ultimately, political roles in a party are about trust, and in politics trust is paramount. Leaders at all levels of the organisation must remain aware that their leadership depends on the trust given to them by the members.

In a democratic party organisation, the leadership must be regularly re-elected at all levels. The members

have the right to demand accountability and withdraw their trust if they do not believe that an elected leader has done their job as expected or if they believe that someone else would do a better job in the future. Regular renewal of the leadership at all levels of the party is important. New thoughts and ideas are essential if the party is to remain up to date with developments in the world at large, and to ensure that that the party does not stagnate – politically and organisationally. It is also important to show the voters that the party can renew itself.

On the other hand, it is good to conserve experience and skills. All parties must strike a balance between the benefits that derive from routine, and the energy and the individuals that come into the mix when a person is new in their role. If you change leaders too often, you lose skills, and it will be harder for voters to recognise the party's representatives. If you change too seldom, the party will be perceived as out of date and jaded.

What is most important is that no leader in the party takes their role for granted. An official role is given on trust, and as such it must be carried out in deference to those who have given that trust.

### **Don't forget about the party culture**

Many of the chapters in this material deal with the formal structures needed to elect leaders and formulate policies. They are about holding meetings, working on executives and how political and personal decisions on policy direction can be made democratically.

In addition, every party that aims to be a vital force in the community, with many active members must be attentive to the party's internal culture and spirit of co-operation. This is about how we behave towards each other in the day-to-day running of the party's activities. About what norms and values govern how we treat each other and the atmosphere we create in the organisation. The last chapter in this module deals with this in more detail.





# The party's decision-making processes and the need for a clear decision-making structure

A democratic party has a clear decision-making structure. This enables the party to make decisions, carry on its activities, and take a stand on political issues in an effective and efficient way. It also makes it possible for the party's members to follow the decision-making process and understand how they can be involved in influencing it.

A system like this is good for the legitimacy of the decisions made by the party and thus reduces the risk of ambiguity, conflicts, and abuses of power.

Although the structure might feel excessively formal at times, basically it is a way of ensuring clarity and a solid basis for cooperation and constructive dialogue in the party.

The goal is for the party's decision-making structure to be based on the participation and influence of its members. But it is not practical to handle all the issues of day-to-day politics through large-scale member ballots. Today's political reality often requires a nimble approach and the need to be flexible as a party. In addition, policy platforms and policies often have to be negotiated with other parties, requiring compromises and agreements.

So it is a practical necessity to delegate power from the members to higher levels in the party and to executives and elected representatives. This means the need for role descriptions and functional, democratic ways of working at these levels.

As far as possible, the party's decision-making structures should reflect how power is actually distributed in the party. There is no point in having a formal structure that does not show how decisions are made in practice. However, here too it is important to emphasise that the party's constitution and a formal decision cannot cover nor account for all the kinds of situations that arise in the party's day-to-day decision-making in every detail.

The important thing is that the fundamentals are clear and that the decision-making process is transparent and open. It should be clear who makes decisions where in the party, and on whose authority. It must be clear who is accountable.

The issue of accountability is extremely important. Anyone who appoints a person as a member of an executive or other official role must always be able to hold that person to account. In a democratic, federated party, accountability is thus shared from the bottom up in the organisation. The Party Executive and Party Chair are held accountable at the next National Conference, meaning that their performance during the passed years is subject to review at the National Conference. The same power structure applies at the regional and local levels.

The structure of a broad-based and democratic mass-based party should also be inclusive and encourage engagement. There must be channels for regular feedback between elected representatives and the members as well as conversations and dialogue between the different levels of the organisation and between different groups so that young people, women, and marginalised groups can also have a voice in the party's policies.

It should also be borne in mind that the decision-making structure of a party must function equally well in government as in opposition. The party must stand on its own feet and function as a movement in its own right, with active members who feel that they can have a say.

# Organisational decision-making levels and their relationships

A democratic party with representatives and activities throughout the country has a number of formal decision-making arenas and assemblies. In these, debate, negotiations, and a reconciliation of the party's national, regional, and local agendas are constantly ongoing processes.

With so much debate and so many decisions, it is important that the members can follow and understand these democratic processes. The party's decision-making structure and basic delegation regime are laid down in the constitution and based on the party's organisational structure. In a federated party, decisions and accountability are bottom-up in the organisation. The lower levels and the members must be able to hold their representatives higher up in the structure to account. For the Party Executive and the Chair of the party, this is about having been entrusted by the National Conference to fulfil their roles, and their accountability to the National Conference being subject to review by the National Conference.

## National Conference

The National Conference is the party's highest decision-making body. The members appoint delegates to the National Conference and all parts of the organisation are bound by the decisions made at the National Conference regarding the party's direction. This applies to all levels of the organisation; to the party leadership and to the various parliamentary groups that operate in the party's name.

The National Conference decides on the party's constitution and party platform. It considers policy and motions received from members. The National Conference elects the national leadership of the party (Party Chair, Party Secretary, Party Executive and Executive Committee) and appoints the Nominating Committee ahead of the forthcoming National Conference as well as a platform panel and auditors.

An important issue is the agenda of the National Conference. The Party Executive produces a draft agenda and rules of procedure, but it is ultimately the National Conference that adopts these. Here, too, the representatives of the members have the final say.

The members can submit suggestions on policy to the National Conference in the form of motions. The Social Democratic local branches can also submit a motion to the



National Conference, as can the executives of the Party Districts. Motions to the National Conference can also be submitted by the Party Executive, its Executive Committee, and the platform panel appointed by the National Conference.

Before the National Conference makes a decision on a motion, the Party Executive discusses it and proposes a well-justified position on the motion for the National Conference.

The decisions made at a National Conference can be at a very high and visionary level or very concrete and practical level. As the highest decision-making body, the National Conference is in a class of its own in terms of deciding for itself how comprehensive or how detailed it should be in its decisions. But the more detailed the decisions are, the more difficult it can be for the party to deal with a political reality that is constantly changing. On the other hand, decisions that are too general in nature can result in the party leadership interpreting these decisions between National Conferences in ways that the members of the party might not feel comfortable with. It is – like so much else – a question of finding a good balance between decisions that are too concrete and decisions that are too vague and theoretical.

## *The review role of the National Conference*

Representatives can review the work of the party leadership in their questions and contributions to the National Conference. When a new party leadership is to be elected, the trust given to those who have been a party's leaders during the period prior to National Conference is tested.

There are also two formal and important instruments of review for the National Conference.

One of these is the auditors. The National Conference elects auditors and deputy auditors, who audit the accounts and present a report to the AGM held by the Party Executive each year. The auditors' task is to audit the Party Executive's finances to determine whether correct proce-

sure has been followed, and whether the party's resources have been utilised in accordance with the decisions made between the National Conferences.

The second review instrument is the Review Committee. This committee is elected by the National Conference and remains in office until the next National Conference to present a review of whether the party leadership and the Party Executive have complied with the decisions of the previous National Conference. It collects and evaluates the auditors' reports, collects questions and opinions from the Party Districts, and also takes up its own questions.

It is important that those who are elected as auditors or members of the Review Committee are not themselves members of the executives they are to review.

The Party Executive must also present a report to the National Conference on operations during its term of office. This report must also include a report from the Social Democrats Group in the parliament. Of course, this will be not be quite the same in different countries. The important thing here is that there is an instrument through which the party's grips in democratically elected parliaments can be held to account before the party as a whole.



## The member and the local level

When you join a party, you become a member of a local branch. Responsibility for organising and involving members in the party's activities lies at this level. This is where much of the party's grass roots communication with citizens and voters occurs. This is where people connect with each other and talk about what citizens think about developments locally, regionally, and nationally. These are conversations that should then influence the development of the party's policies at all levels.

The local branch decides who the party's candidates will be in local elections, the platform that the party will present in local elections, and the position that the party will take in relation to local political issues that are currently on the agenda. It also nominates candidates for the party's official roles at the regional and national levels. These nominations are reported to the regional party organisation.

Since the party organisation is federated, each local branch of the party has the right to determine its own political priorities. It can decide independently what issues it wants to pursue internally in the party and how it wants to participate in and influence the party's regional and national levels. Furthermore, all levels in the organisation have a joint responsibility to comply with the joint decisions of the National Conference and the Party Executive, as well as the District Conference and District Executive so that the party's policies and messages to voters remain coherent.

The local branch meets once each year for an Annual General Meeting (AGM) which is the highest decision-making body at the local party level. At this AGM, a Chair, an Executive, a Nominating Committee, and auditors are elected. All members are entitled to write and move motions at the AGM, on organisational and policy matters as well as in preferential voting. Voting is open and no member may transfer their vote to anyone else. Preferential voting uses secret ballot papers if requested by anyone at the meeting.

Auditors are also elected at the AGM. They audit the party's finances and submit a report that everything has been in accordance with correct procedure and that the Executive

### FACTS

#### HOW ARE DELEGATES ELECTED?

The election of delegates to the National Conference begins with the Party Executive deciding on the constituencies no later than six months before the National Conference. After that, the election of delegates begins at the earliest five months and at the latest three months before the National Conference.

All members are permitted to stand as a candidate and it is the local branch that handles the election process itself. The election can be conducted by letter or electronic voting. The local branch decides this on its own. The voting rules are determined by the District Executive.

A person who votes should be able to prove that they have paid their membership fee to the party at least two weeks before voting starts. The District Executive is responsible for counting the votes and the person who receives the most votes is elected its delegate. Substitutes are also elected for those who are elected as Party District delegates – they are the candidates who have received the most votes after those who were elected to be the delegates. The delegates elected to an ordinary National Conference then remain delegates right up until the next ordinary National Conference. In other words, if an extraordinary National Conference is called, the same delegate serves at this conference as at the previous ordinary National Conference. ■

has followed the decisions made by the AGM and members meetings and the Executive's own decisions during the year. If the auditors deem this to be the case, they propose that the Executive who have been in office during the year be discharged from liability. As we pointed out earlier, it is not appropriate for those appointed as auditors to also be members of the bodies that they audit.

Members meetings are to be held regularly during the year. At these meetings, the members of the local branch can participate and influence the decisions that regularly arise as part of the party's political and organisational activities between the AGMs.

When the AGM or members meetings of the local branch is not in session, the Executive is the highest decision-making body of the local branch. The Executive must act in accordance with the constitution and the decisions made at the National Conference, District Conference, local branch AGM and members meetings. With this as its guide, the Executive is required to interpret the decisions of the members in relation to day-to-day politics and what is happening in the world at large.



### **A MOTION – FROM PROPOSAL TO THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

As a member of the party, you are always entitled to submit policy or organisational motions to the National Conference. Before it reaches the National Conference, a motion needs to pass the other levels of the party organisation. This means that it should first and foremost be submitted to the local branch. The local branch then considers the motion at an AGM or a members meeting at which everyone can express their opinion on the member's motion. If the meeting votes in favour of the motion, the entire local branch then stands behind the motion and passes the motion on to the annual District Conference. If the members meeting in the local branch votes against it, the motion is still passed on to the District Conference, but without the support of the local branch.

If the District Conference votes in favour of the motion, the whole regional organisation then stands behind the motion and it is sent to the National Conference. If the majority at the District Conference vote against the motion, the motion continues to the National Conference as simply a motion from a member. It goes without saying that it is more difficult for an individual member to get a hearing for their motion at the National Conference unless it has first gained support at the local branch and Party District levels.



### **The regional decision-making level**

In Sweden, the party's regional level is called Party Districts. The boundaries of the Party Districts usually coincide with Sweden's constituencies in general elections to the national parliament and with Sweden's administrative regions, which are responsible for health care, infrastructure, education, and the like. The Party Districts are thus responsible for coordinating the party's policies and appointing candidates for their own regional parliaments, as well as the national parliament.

The Party Districts are composed of all the party's main local branches located within the region. It is the Party Districts that coordinate the local branches' policies and positions and pursue them at the national level of the party: The National Conference and the Party Executive. All local branches have the right to send delegates to the annual District Conference based on their number of members. All members of the Party District have the right to propose candidates for their delegates, and these are then elected at a members meeting of the local branch.

All members are also entitled to submit policy and organisational motions to the District Conference through their local branches. The local branches are also entitled to submit their own motions to the District Conferences, even without a motion having first been moved by an individual member.

It is then the annual District Conference that determines the policy direction and organisational development of the Party District and elects the Party District's Executive, Nominating Committee, and auditors.

The Executive is then the Party District's highest decision-making body until the next District Conference and is responsible for interpreting and implementing the District Conference's decisions as well as making decisions and pursuing the party's agenda in general. If the Party District wants to, it can also appoint an Executive Committee at the District Conference. This Committee will meet more frequently than the Executive itself and will handle more of the day-to-day work of the party, often in conjunction with a secretariat of party officers and politically appointed officials. The Executive Committee is accountable to the Executive, which in turn is accountable to the District Conference.

*“All members are also entitled to submit policy and organisational motions to the District Conference through their local branches.”*

If the District Conference is not satisfied with the work done during the year, the District Conference can change the composition of the Executive and, in the event of serious deviations, refuse to discharge the outgoing Executive from liability. The same conditions and accountability apply at the local branch and national levels.

The Social Democrats group in the regional parliament must also submit a report to the District Conference on its operations during the year. It is important that these

elected representatives of the party are held accountable to the members of the Party District.

A district can also hold a District Council once each year or when deemed necessary. Its purpose is to provide regular briefings to the local branches which are entitled to send delegates based on the same numbers model as to the District Conference. The District Council does not make any final decisions, but is more about the political conversation and briefings on current issues.



## CHOOSING CANDIDATES FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS

The process of choosing who represents the party in elected assemblies is a key issue for a party. It is often these people who become the public face of the party to the electorate, and it is they who exert a great deal of real political influence at the local, regional, and national levels. Here too, the structure is federated. Power flows from the bottom up in the organisation. All members have the right to propose candidates for political roles and to participate in the decision-making process when these candidates are elected.

### Representatives in local parliaments (local councils)

If, as is the case in Sweden, there are associations/clubs that form the local branch, it is these who nominate candidates for the local elections. The Nominating Committee of the local branch then submits a proposal, which is presented at a members meeting. The meeting then decides who will be the party's candidates in the local elections.

It is important to distinguish between the party organisation as part of civil society and the party as part of a parliamentary structure. It is not unusual that those in leadership roles in the local branch are also the party's main representatives in the local parliament. But that does not have to be the case. On the contrary, in many countries it is common to separate these two functions. There is a Chair of the local party and a leader/Chair of the party's parliamentary group. This makes it clear to the vot-



ers/citizens that the party is not just part of the machinery of power.

### Representatives in regional parliaments

Local branches nominate candidates for the regional parliaments. These nominations are sent to the District Executive, which compiles the list and functions here as a Nominating Committee. The Executive then submits a proposal to the District Conference, which is held before a general election, in which these candidates are presented to the voters and stand for election to the regional parliament. The Party Districts may also choose to hold a separate conference, where the only item on the agenda is choosing the candidates for the election.

Here, too, social democratic parties often separate the role of Chair of the Party District and that of leader/Chair of the party's regional parliamentary group. The Chair of the Party District heads the organisation. The leader/Chair of the regional parliamentary group should be the candidate with the best skills for representing the party on matters that the regional parliament has responsibility for.

### Representatives in national parliaments

Here, too, all members can participate in the nomination process through their local branches. In a system with majoritarian voting in single-member constituencies, the party organisation in the constituency in question usually appoints its candidate. Sometimes this occurs after proposals from or consultations with the national or regional level within the party.

Sweden applies a system of proportional representation in larger constituencies. This means that you have party lists instead of individual candidates.

Since a constituency for the *Riksdag* (Sweden's national parliament) has the same boundaries as a Party District, it is the Party Districts that are responsible for producing these lists. At a members meeting, the local branches decide on and send their nominations to the Party District's Executive. It is the Party District Executive that acts as the Nominating Committee and produces the list of candidates. This list is then adopted at the District Conference held in the months prior to general elections or at a separate Party district conference for this purpose.

At the national level, it is more common for the same person to hold the roles of Party Chair and the party's top representative in the *Riksdag*. However, if the party is in government, the party's group in the *Riksdag* is led by someone other than the Party Chair.



## National decision-making level

To be able to lead the party between National Conferences and work actively in politics and with the organisation, the National Conference delegates powers and authorities to the Party Executive and the Executive Committee.

### *Party Executive*

The Party Executive is accountable to the National Conference and is the party's highest decision-making body when the National Conference is not in session. It is responsible for coordination and the national work of the party between National Conferences, appoints the Party Treasurer and adopts a delegation regime for both the Party Executive and the Executive Committee.

The Party Executive is the forum for broad political debates as well as raising practical questions about its operations and the organisation. It is a forum where representatives from all over the country and the party's affiliated organisations come together to discuss current policy issues. This is where differences in political opinions can be aired, talks are held, and decisions on the party's line are made. It is a forum where the party leadership can regularly connect with the party organisation at the national level and outline their reasoning on the positions they have taken, while Party Executive members from different parts of the country get a chance to air their views.

It is the Executive Committee that decides how often the Party Executive meets. If at least five members of the Party Executive request a meeting, it must be held. In practice, the Party Executive usually meets once each month, along with the AGM. The AGM deals with financial issues and other items to be included on the agenda of an AGM, even if there is no preferential voting for the Chair

or similar roles of course. These are always matters for the National Conference.

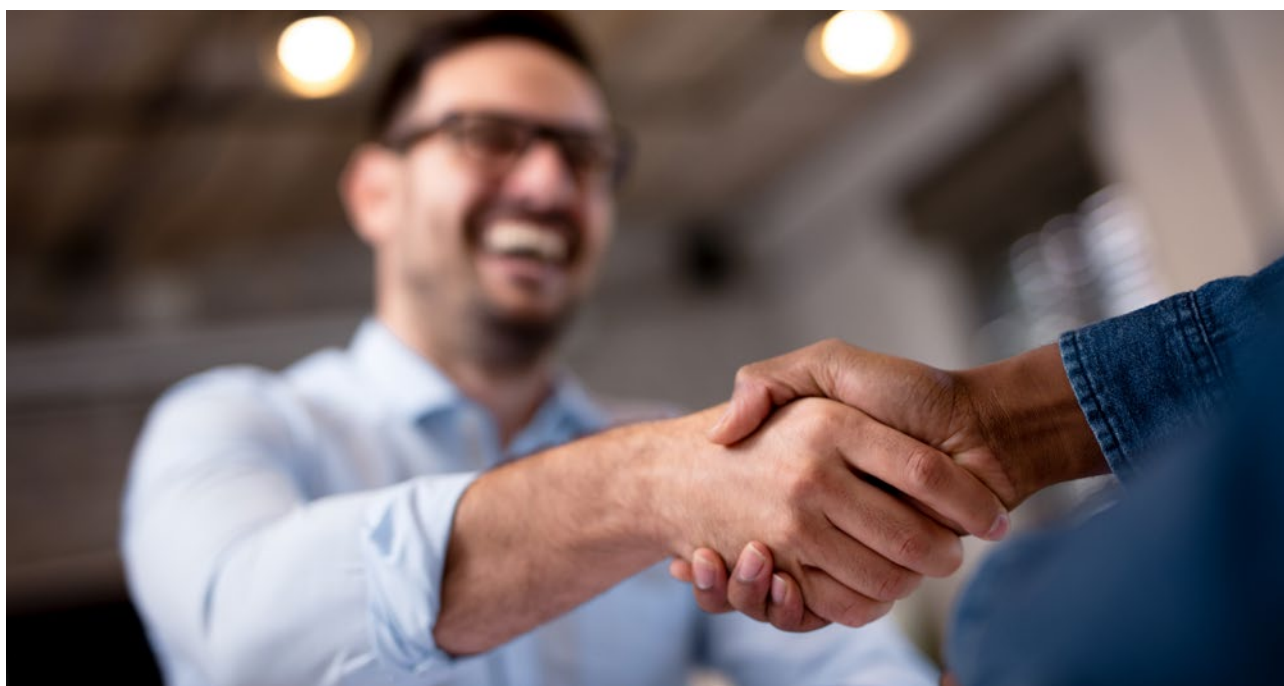
### *The Executive Committee*

The Executive Committee is a working party within the Party Executive. It is also appointed by the National Conference. It is responsible for the operative management of the party's policies and activities and usually meets more often than the Party Executive.

The Executive Committee is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the decisions made by the National Conference and the Party Executive are in fact implemented. This is also where the decisions of the National Conference are interpreted in relation to the day-to-day work of politics and the organisation. The parliamentary group should also be included in the dialogue when it comes to matters relating to the work of the national parliament.

### *National handshake agreements*

The Party Executive and its Secretariat have regular briefings with the highest party functionaries from each Party District or with the chairs of each Party District to assist them. These briefings are important because there are many issues of an advisory or detailed nature that do not fit into the more formal decision-making structure. So while these briefings are not any kind of decision-making meeting in the formal sense, participants from the Party Districts have the right to make handshake (gentlemen's) agreements with the other participants and often take home with them matters that require a decision in their Party Districts. These regular meetings and briefings with all the regional party organisations thus provide a good communication channel for matters related to the everyday workings of the party.





## DELEGATION REGIME

To further supplement the constitution, it can be a wise idea to have a delegation regime for different levels and functions in the party. Although this does not have the same weight as the constitution, it is a useful tool for each level in the organisation to further clarify roles and the distribution of power within that level of the organisation. For example, a delegation regime can regulate:

- The responsibilities and powers of the Party Executive and the Executive Committee
- The responsibilities and powers of the Party Chair
- The responsibilities and powers of the Party Treasurer

It should be within the framework of the constitution, with more detailed areas of responsibility being added on as required. The clearer the delegation regime, the less room there is for ambiguity about who is responsible for what. Here is an example of a Party Executive's delegation regime within the national leadership of a party:

### 1. *The Party Executive (PE)*

The Party Executive handles the management of the party's operations in accordance with the party's policy platform and constitution and the decisions made by the National Conference. It is the highest decision-making body of the party when the National Conference is not in session. Under this mandate, the Party Executive has decided the following:

### 2. *Delegation to the Executive Committee (EC)*

- The EC prepares matters for consideration by the Party Executive and interpretations of National Conference decisions.
- The EC decides on the budget and the business plan of the Party Executive.
- The EC decides on internal guidelines and policies.
- The EC decides on the party's representation at various international assemblies.
- The EC decides who will represent the party in trusts and foundations.
- The EC appoints the members of commissions and other committees and working parties.
- The EC appoints the Head of the Party Executive Secretariat.

### 3. *Delegation to the Party Chair*

- The Party Chair is the party's most senior representative and leads the work of the Party Executive and the Executive Committee.
- The Party Chair is attached to a political leadership group. This is a consultative and preparatory body and is responsible for the day-to-day coordination of the policy positions of the Party Executive and the Riksdag group.
- The political leadership group includes the Party Chair, the Party Secretary, the Riksdag group leader and the spokesperson on economic policy.

### 4. *Delegation to the Party Secretary*

- The Party Secretary is responsible for leading the party's organisation and is therefore responsible for implementing the party's tasks.
- The Party Secretary determines the delegation regime for the Party Executive Secretariat.
- The Party Secretary prepares matters for consideration by the Executive Committee.
- Unless otherwise specified in this delegation regime, the Party Secretary is to choose who represents the party in other external bodies.

### 5. *Delegation to Party Treasurer*

- The Party Treasurer is responsible for the party's ongoing financial affairs and for the management of its assets.
- The Party Treasurer prepares decision guidance documents for the Party Executive and the Executive Committee regarding the budget, financial reporting, annual report, and reservations and provisions.
- The Party Treasurer manages work related to staff and employer responsibilities for the party as a whole.

### 6. *Delegation to spokespersons*

The Social democratic group leaders in the various committees in the Riksdag is the spokespersons for their area of responsibility unless otherwise decided by the Party Executive. In addition to the group leaders, there is a designated spokesperson on economic policy.

# The party and its representatives in elected assemblies

Much of what we are going through here is about where power and responsibility lie internally within a party organisation. But an important part of a party's activities is within the parliamentary assemblies in which it has representatives, principally in national, regional, and local parliaments.

The groups in these assemblies, which in terms of day-to-day work account for much of what is de facto the party's politics, have a looser connection to the formal decision-making hierarchy. While the party members have chosen them as the party's representatives, they also have their mandate in the parliament directly from the voters, who are a much broader group than the party members.

Here, principles are important: It is the party that establishes the policies that the elected representatives are to follow in the parliament. Those who do not fulfil this requirement will be held to account by the party organisation. At the same time, however, their mandate is not circumscribed. They themselves make decisions on what positions they take on issues. In other words, the

trust given to them cannot be revoked between elections, only just prior to the next elections, when the party again determines who will represent it.

This means that elected representatives need to listen to the party, but it also means that the party organisation must accept that it cannot micromanage their decisions in detail.

As we have seen in the previous sections, the Social Democrat groups in Sweden's elected assemblies at different levels have a duty to report regularly on their work to the party organisation at the same level. This is a way of emphasising that it is each level's conference or AGM that has given them the authority to make decisions on behalf of the party.

It is also a good idea to have regular forums for consultation and discussion of the party's direction in these parliaments. And when disagreements arise or when difficult balances need to be struck, there must be a predetermined and well-established system for how such matters are to be resolved.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Is it important that there is a clear decision-making structure and transparent decision-making processes in parties? What are the consequences if these don't exist?
- What is the decision-making structure in our own party? Does our constitution clearly describe our decision-making structures – where and how decisions are to be made and elections held? If not, what needs more clarification?
- How are responsibilities and roles distributed between different levels? At the national, regional, and local levels? Who does what, and who holds who accountable?
- Are our decision-making and election processes transparent and open? Where are these actually described and who is responsible for doing this?
- Is the decision-making structure inclusive and does it invite and support active participation? Do we have a way of working that, as far as possible, is based on the participation and influence of the member? If yes, in what way? If no, why? What is lacking?
- How do audits and accountability work? What are the mechanisms for this and when do these occur? For example, within our local branch?
- This section also highlights the relationship between a party and its representatives in elected assemblies – arenas where two different systems of mandate meet and overlap. What is the process for consultation in our own party organisation?



# The central role of meetings and ballots

In a political party, a large number of internal meetings need to be regularly convened to make decisions, conduct ballots, and discuss the political situation and how the party's activities are to be conducted. These meetings are important for the practical functioning of a party and are central to its internal democratic process.

The members must always be the core of a democratic party. This is why the party's decision-making structure and activities must be built around the influence of members and the distribution of power. When someone becomes a member of a political party, they generally do so because they want to be involved in influencing and developing policy, and being part of democratic decision-making.

This right is exercised primarily at meetings and through ballots, where the member has the right to express their opinion and to vote on various policies and for candidates. The basic principle is always one member, one vote.

With today's digital technology, there are almost no limits on how the organisation can conduct meetings and allow members to have their say. Applying general membership ballots to a greater extent and letting members directly elect individuals and make decisions on issues is an easy way to rapidly increase engagement and make members feel a very real sense of influence. At the same time, of course, this is no substitute for the democratic conversation and importance of the meeting for a party's decision-making and the election of representatives. Meetings and ballots must be held regularly and have clear, democratic, and transparent rules governing how debate is conducted and decisions made. Whether they are online or physically in the same room. These meetings are, in fact, the heart and soul of a democratic party.

## The need for a clear and democratic order of business

Many meetings that occur in a party are informal. They happen on an everyday basis, in conversations and networks. This will always be the case in an organisation that functions as a network of fellow members of the party. However, for the organisation to remain open, democratic, and transparent, there must be meetings that are formal and based on a well-considered and predictable structure and regime, where everyone has the chance to express their opinion and have their say. This is particularly important when it comes to preferential voting and when the party's overall policy direction and activities are determined.

It is therefore essential that the party has a clear order of business and a democratic way of working for its formal meetings and ballots. All those who have the right to participate in a meeting should be called to the meeting in good time and it should be clear what is on the agenda. During the meeting itself, it should be clear what decisions are made and what processes were used to reach each decision. Formal rules and governance are particularly important in larger meetings for everyone to be able to participate on an equal footing. A disorganised meeting where no one seems to be in control of procedure, who has the floor, or how decisions are made is never good and leaves the meeting open to a few individuals taking over and dominating proceedings.

This is why there are well-established rules and facilitation techniques. Some of the rules that are fundamental to holding an effective and democratic meeting:

- 1 Anyone who is entitled to attend the meeting should be called to the meeting. The notice to attend must be sent out well in advance of the meeting and contain practical details of where and when the meeting will be held and what the meeting will be about. Everyone must be given a chance to attend and prepare for the meeting.
- 2 The meeting must have a clear agenda. The agenda should describe what the meeting is going to be about. The Executive should already have outlined this in the notice to attend the meeting. It is important that the Executive does not introduce any new points of importance after the notice to attend has been sent out. At the beginning of the meeting, however, members should have the right to propose new items for the agenda. After this, the meeting should stick to the agenda, so that everyone knows what is being discussed and decided.
- 3 It is important that the meeting makes clear decisions and that the person chairing the meeting is clear about the order in which matters are to be decided.
- 4 Under each item on the agenda, there must be room for those who come to the meeting to make their voices heard, to argue and to move motions.
- 5 Minutes of the meeting must be kept, so that everyone can go back and see what was actually decided.

Most members of a party do not attend meetings because they are interested in the formal structures. Many who come to a political meeting may be there for the first time, in which case it is important to be welcoming and open, and to keep on explaining the different steps and processes involved in the meeting without making it more

complicated than it is. The form of a meeting is designed to simplify working with its content and to give everyone a chance to get involved. If the content becomes subordinate to its form, the party has problems. This places significant demands on those who organise meetings, and on those who are appointed to lead them. There is no reason for the chair of a meeting to be overly formal in their tone or way of presenting matters, while the formalities must be both strict and clear. A few things you might want to consider:

- Make your tone in relation to those attending the meeting congenial and inviting. If the way in which the meeting and its formalities are presented sounds like you are inviting the attendees to a session of the Supreme Court, there is good reason to rethink and rewrite.
- Always ensure that the content, the political and organisational decisions to be made, remain central.
- Make sure that you maintain a positive atmosphere as far as possible. Those who come to the meeting are all members of the same party and are basically striving for the same political vision, even if they may have different views on specific issues.

Besides the fact that formal meetings can be experienced as rigid and complicated, many attendees may feel that the focus is more on making decisions than on lively debate and reaching a consensus. This requires a broader palette and also having meetings that are not decision-making meetings, but more focused on discussing a political or organisational development, where the perspective is more collaborative and exploratory. There are a variety of methods and forms for meetings that can be used for these kinds of meetings, and we cover some of these in later modules in the introductory course. Ultimately, it is important that it remains clear which meetings are decision-making meetings and which are not.

*“ The form of a meeting is designed to simplify working with its content and to give everyone a chance to get involved. If the content becomes subordinate to its form, the party has problems. ”*

## FACILITATION TECHNIQUES FOR FORMAL MEETINGS

Some areas that are important for efficient, effective, and democratic meetings are:

### WHO DOES WHAT AT THE MEETING?

For a meeting to function well, you need a number of meeting officers. The most common are the following:



**Chair of the meeting** – has a key role, of course. It is the Chair's task to ensure that everyone is heard during the meeting, that the agenda is respected, that motions moved are put to the vote and that discussions do not go off the rails. Often this is the same person who has been appointed Chair of the organisation, but just as often a specific person is elected to chair the meeting itself. At the AGM, the person elected to chair the organisation should not also chair the meeting itself.



**Meeting secretary** – keeps the minutes and ensures that motions moved at the meeting are documented along with the results of votes on the motions, and what decisions were made.



**Minutes checkers** – appointed by the meeting at the start. Their task is to review the minutes when ready to establish that what is in the minutes is in line with what actually happened at the meeting. They then sign the minutes together with the meeting secretary and the chair of the meeting.



**Vote counters** – at AGMs it is good to appoint vote counters, sometimes also at other meetings. They should be at least two to avoid any misunderstandings.

### THE AGENDA

The agenda lists and describes in brief the issues to be addressed at the meeting and the order in which this should be done. Some items are regular items on an agenda:

**Adoption of the agenda.** The Executive has submitted a proposal for the agenda, but the meeting is free to add or subtract items from it.

**Rules of procedure.** These describe how the meeting should proceed in purely practical terms. How ballots are to be conducted, if there are limitations on speaking time and so on. At the beginning of the meeting, the rules of procedure should be reviewed so that everyone agrees on them.

**Any other business.** This is a very important item on the agenda. No major, final decisions should be made under Any other business, as this item is intended for issues that arise spontaneously from members or for minor reports or relatively marginal issues.

But it is an important item under which members can raise and air issues they want to discuss. While it should be possible to move motions and vote under the item Any other business, if these are issues of greater significance, the Executive should be instructed to prepare the matter for the next meeting.

Remember, if you don't fill the agenda with items that are just reports on things that have already happened, the meeting will be a better experience for the attendees. These include reports on meetings or conferences attended by the Executive or events held by the organisation. These are important, of course, but it is even more important that those who come to a meeting are able to discuss and decide on matters that lie in the future.

### DECISION

Once the discussion is finished, it is time to move to a decision. Remember that the Chair must be clear about the point at which this happens. If there is only one motion, it is simple. However, there are often several motions. Then it is up to the Chair to ensure that all motions are considered on an equal basis at the meeting. Firstly, the Chair reports on the motions received. The meeting is then able to determine whether the Chair has understood the matter correctly. The Chair then lays out how and in what order the decisions are to be dealt with. This is called the chart of motions. There are specific rules for these.

It is common for motions in the first round to be decided by the participants in the meeting in a viva voce by calling out yea or nay (yes or no) to the motion when it is moved. Then the Chair declares what they understand the outcome to be. If anyone at the meeting does not share the Chair's view on whether or not the motion has received the most yea votes, it is possible to put the motion to a ballot.

### PUTTING A MOTION TO THE VOTE

When a motion is put to the vote, it means that the votes are counted again. It is common practice in the first instance to do so by a show of hands. If someone at the meeting still believes that the Chair is wrong in assessing that the motion has been carried, it is possible to ask for an actual vote count. If there are as many votes for as against the motion, it is usual for the Chair of the meeting to have the casting vote. Sometimes the matter might also be resolved by drawing lots.



# Key meetings in party decision-making processes

In a political party, a large number of internal meetings are regularly convened to make decisions, to conduct ballots, to discuss the political situation and how well the party is functioning. These meetings are important for the internal democratic processes and for the practical functioning of a party. On the one hand, there are meetings open to the members, to participate in or to choose representatives for meetings held at a different organisational level; and on the other hand, there are meetings held by the representatives of the organisation elected by the members, in the form of Executive meetings or other working party meetings. We will return to the latter in the next chapter.

## Branch General Meetings

The local branch's members meetings is the highest decision-making body between AGMs. It is important to hold meetings and give members opportunities to have their say regularly throughout the year. In a local branch, such meetings are generally held once a month or at least quarterly. Regardless of exactly how regularly they are held, it is important for the internal democracy of the party that the Executive is given the opportunity to inform the members about operations and to get input from its members. A meeting might also be held to inform the members about something that has happened that impacts the party organisation. This might be a change in policy overall, or other factors that have an impact on policy or organisational positions that the party must make. By holding regular members meetings, you are more likely to have a local branch that stands united behind the party and is engaged in a meaningful way in the party's many tasks.

Often, it can be difficult to get members to be sufficiently engaged to attend regular meetings. There are many reasons for this. In many countries today, it is reported that party members do not feel that they can have a real say in their party, even if they do attend meetings. In addition, competition for our time is more intense today than perhaps ever before. Many people have irregular working hours and even in their non-working hours they are torn between the demands of home, children and other matters that need to be attended to in everyday life. A few things you might want to consider:

- Time and place matter. Hold meetings after normal working hours so that as many people as possible have the opportunity to attend, and in a location that is easy to get to. Provide child minding during the meeting.

- Don't make the meeting too long. A meeting of no more than two hours is usually best. It can also be useful to take a break in the middle of the meeting and provide some refreshments. The conversations that arise spontaneously during the break can be very important for the energy of the meeting and the development of the group.
- Set a good agenda. It is the responsibility of the local Executive to put together an agenda that works. It is important to plan the meeting so that it is meaningful and effective. It might be a good idea to have different themes at each meeting so that it is clear what is going to be discussed.



## AGENDA FOR BRANCH GENERAL MEETINGS

For example, a typical members meeting might have the following basic agenda:

1. Declaring the meeting open and welcoming those present
2. Formal decisions on the agenda, election of officers for the meeting and rules of procedure
3. Policy issues
4. Reports from committees and commissions in the local branch
5. Report from the party's group in the local parliamentary assembly
6. Activities going on in the near future
7. Any other business
8. Declaring the meeting over.

But set a goal that your meetings should not be boring affairs with only formalities and reports. Instead, aim for your meetings to be engaging and energetic; ensure that the topics of discussion that are about policy are relevant and interesting for potential newcomers. Other tips are:

- Plan and prepare your meetings well – meetings put together hastily rarely turn out well.
- Think about and base the meeting on what the members want and are interested in.
- Acknowledge and welcome new members who are attending the meeting for the first time when the meeting is opened.
- Create plenty of opportunities for active participation and dialogue for the members – be open about providing information and engaging in leading the meetings.
- Try to be creative about the form of meetings and make sure that policy and political dialogue lie at the heart of the meeting – such as discussing current political issues.
- Invite interesting speakers, representatives and experts to speak on current issues and collaborate with other local actors and organisations.

Today, with all the new digital technologies available, as we pointed out in the introduction of this chapter, it is also easy to hold meetings online using tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Skype. This also makes it easier for more members to fit the meetings into their busy schedules. However, it is important to consider accessibility here. Online meetings can be a barrier to participation for people on low incomes. Whatever the form of the meeting, one key objective should always be that everyone attending the meeting should feel that they have learned something new and that they have contributed something. It might also be useful to bear in mind that you can invite representatives from other local branches, or other actors, to the meeting. This can provide interesting input for the members and be a way of strengthening the party's local networks.

### Annual General Meeting

At the local and regional levels of the party, an Annual General Meeting (AGM) or Conference is held each year, and is the highest decision-making body at that level. This is sometimes just called the annual meeting. At the national level, as we have seen, the National Conference is usually held less frequently, for example every two or four years.

The members choose their leaders through direct elections at the AGM – a Chair and an Executive. At this meeting, the Executive reports on the party's activities and the financial position of the organisation during the past year. All members have the right to express an opinion and move motions at the meeting and then to vote.



Voting is open and the right to vote may not be transferred to another member. Here is a brief checklist of matters that ought to be addressed by the AGM:

#### *Executive's Activity Report*

Here the Executive reports on activities during the past year. Sometimes it is the Chair who presents the entire report, but in general the members of the Executive are permitted to report on the areas of activity for which they have been responsible during the year. These reports should be presented in as simple and straightforward a way as possible, and included the facts that are deemed reasonable in the context. If the reporting is too detailed, the members will lose interest and the report will take too long to go through. If on the other hand it is too general, the report won't say enough about the party's activities. For example, an activity report may include:

- The number of members.
- The number of meetings held during the year.
- Results of campaigns or similar events held during the year.
- What meetings have been held with other parties or organisations, conferences and the like attended. by representatives of the party's organisation, and progress on internal work within the party.
- The work carried out in subcommittees and similar groups within the Executive and the organisation as a whole.

Because this is the Executive's Activity Report, the AGM cannot change it. However, the meeting can make additions or amendments which are recorded in the minutes of the AGM.

#### *Executive's Financial Report*

Here, the Party Treasurer gives an account of the organisation's finances during the year. In the same way as the Activity Report, the Financial Report must be presented in writing for the AGM. It should also be sent out in advance along with the notice to attend the meeting. A financial report should provide a good and transparent picture of the party's finances over the past year. It should include:

- Total revenue.
- Total expenditure.
- Where the revenue has come from.
- What the expenditure had gone to (generally).
- A balance sheet.
- Future opportunities for fundraising or other ways of increasing revenue.

The Financial Report must be based on receipts and invoices showing all revenue and expenses during the year. These should not be presented at the AGM. That would

be an example of providing information that is far too detailed. But this information should be available to those members who want to look more closely at what lies behind the figures in the Financial Report.

### **Auditors' Report**

The auditors' task is to review the work of the Executive and to assess whether they have fulfilled its obligations to the AGM. This is mainly about ensuring that the party's finances have been properly managed, but it can also deal with how the Executive has utilised the resources of the organisation in relation to the priorities set by the previous AGM. At the AGM, the auditors who worked with the party during the year present a written report and, if the Executive has fulfilled its obligations, they propose that the Executive be discharged from liability.

### **Discharge from liability**

Discharge from liability means that the members, based on the information they have received, approve the way in which the Executive has managed activities during the year. If a member does not share the opinion of the auditors, the member may move a motion to the effect that discharge from liability should not be granted. If the AGM grants the Executive discharge from liability, it means that the AGM has approved the management of the party's activities and finances during its term of office. When the vote is taken to discharge the Executive from liability, the members of the Executive are not entitled to vote.

### **Motions**

Members may submit proposals to the AGM in the form of motions, which are to be in writing and sent to the Executive within the specified time. It is best if they are formulated as concrete proposals on which the meeting can take a position. If they are formulated as general arguments without concrete proposals, it will be difficult for the meeting to know what it is that they are to decide on.

### **Election of the Executive**

The AGM elects an Executive for the following financial year. Often the Chair – and sometimes also the Secretary and the Treasurer – is elected separately. If the AGM does not elect the Secretary and the Treasurer, after the AGM the Executive may allocate these tasks within the Executive at its constituent meeting. The proposal for the Executive is prepared by a Nominating Committee. If members at the AGM want to propose candidates other than those proposed by the Nominating Committee, they are to be included in the vote. Preferential voting is then done with a secret ballot if anyone requests this. In a secret ballot, the candidates are listed in alphabetical order on the ballot paper. If there are an equal number of votes in an open vote, the Chair has the casting vote.

## **PREFERENTIAL VOTING FOR OFFICIAL ROLES ON THE EXECUTIVE**

There are a number of specific steps that you should include when electing an Executive at an AGM.

Prepare by having slips of paper ready to write on if a secret ballot is requested. Don't forget to appoint vote counters at the start of the meeting, and it's a good idea to have a representative or checker from a higher level of the party in place at the meeting to certify that everything has been done correctly. The meeting Chair then needs to follow a few clear and simple steps:

- Call for candidates to one official role at a time. Start with the Chair, then Deputy Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and so on.
- When the Nominating Committee has presented its proposed candidate, ask the meeting if there are any other candidates and leave the floor free for the meeting to propose candidates.
- Ask the candidates if they agree to take on the role if elected.
- Hold the election for one official role at a time before the meeting moves on to the election for the next role. This means that someone who stood for election for the Chair, but was not elected, can be nominated again for any other official role on the Executive.
- In the event of a secret ballot, all those entitled to vote are to receive a ballot paper on which they write down the name of their preferred candidate. They then fold the ballot paper and submit it without anyone seeing who they voted for.
- Collect the ballot papers in a box, so that the process remains in full view of everyone the whole time.
- Count the votes in public so that everyone can see that the ballot has been conducted correctly. ■





### *Election of auditors*

Each AGM must elect one or more auditors to audit the work of the Executive with the party's activities and finances during the coming financial year. An auditor cannot also sit on the Executive. If an auditor were to sit on the Executive, the Auditors' Report would not be credible.

### *Election of Nominating Committee*

The Nominating Committee's task is to prepare proposals for candidates for the Executive and auditors and other functions for the next AGM. Proposals for candidates for election at the AGM should be sent to the Nominating Committee within the time frame set by the local branch's members meeting. A person who sits on or is nominated to stand as a candidate for the Executive may not also sit on the Nominating Committee. Candidates for the Nominating Committee are proposed by the Executive. It is important to consider gender distribution in a Nominating Committee. Gender equality can be incorporated into the organisation in many ways, and one of these ways is by electing more women to official roles in the party. A good way to start that process is to ensure that the party's Nominating Committees have an even gender distribution.

Many parties also adopt guidelines for future activities at the AGM, with a budget that sets out revenue and expenditure for the coming year, and a business plan that sets out the organisation's priorities until the next AGM. Otherwise the AGM leaves it up to the new Executive to decide on these matters.

In addition to these items on the agenda, there may of course be a number of policy and organisational matters that need to be dealt with at an AGM. These include reports from the party organisation's representatives in local elected assemblies or working parties; the adoption of lists of candidates for local government elections, or lists of delegates to other party bodies such as the District Conference of the regional party organisation; and statements of opinion on current political issues, etc. These are determined on a case-by-case basis and from year to year.

## TEMPLATE AGENDA FOR THE AGM OF A LOCAL BRANCH

1. Opening, adoption of the agenda.
2. Adoption of the list of voters.
3. Question as to whether the AGM has been properly convened.
4. Election of officers for the AGM.
  - a) Chair of the AGM.
  - b) Secretary to record the minutes of the meeting.
  - c) Two persons to check the minutes.
  - d) Two vote counters to count the vote.
5. The Executive's Activity Report, including the financial report.
6. The Auditors' report.
7. Adoption of the financial report.
8. Decision to grant the Executive discharge from liability.
9. Other reports.
10. Proposals by Executive members and motions by members.
11. Election of members of the Executive and their substitutes.
12. Election of auditors and their substitutes.
13. Election of Nominating Committee for the coming year.
14. Other elections.
15. Any other business.
16. Closure of the Annual General Meeting.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why are meetings important for a party to function well and be democratic? What role do they play in how our party carries on its activities, makes decisions, and develops?
- What is the role of our meetings in the democratic conversation and alignment within the party? Could we make use of direct voting online to a greater extent in our party? If not, why not?
- What role and significance do formal and informal meetings play in party activities? How do these differ and what is the trigger for when it would be appropriate to move from an informal meeting to a more formal one?
- What powers do AGMs have in our local branch? How does the AGM choose the Executive and other elected representatives?
- What powers do the members meetings of our local branch have compared to other assemblies in the party? Is the members meeting the highest decision-making body between AGMs? Are meetings and votes held regularly in our local branch?
- Are members able to participate, make their voices heard, and influence the party through meetings and ballots held at our meetings? If not, why not?
- Are the meetings based on a clear order of business and basic democratic rules whereby everyone has the chance to express their opinion and make a difference? If not, why not? What consequences do that have?
- Do all kinds of members have the opportunity to participate actively at our members meetings? If not, which members have difficulty in participating and making their voices heard? Why? And how can we change that?
- Could our meetings be perceived as rigid, formal, and difficult to follow? Do they invite participation and debate, or not? If they don't, what are the reasons for this?
- How can our meetings be simplified and made less rigid, formal, and difficult to follow without running the risk of side-lining the democratic rules of the game?



# Executives and the work of an Executive

It is an honour and a privilege to be elected to serve on an Executive and represent the members of the party. All parties and organisations that want to be successful need members who are prepared to take on the responsibility of being elected to serve as a member of the Executive.

The entire organisation ought to welcome that level of commitment and support those who take on such a role, which is often time-consuming and exposes the individual to the opinions and judgements of others. However, the organisation must also hold its elected representatives to account when their work is reviewed at the next AGM.

The Executive manages the running of the party's activities. The Executive should not be interpreted as superior to the members. The Executive is elected by them and is therefore accountable and subordinate to them. The Exe-

cutive is chosen to represent the party organisation and has thus been given the right to speak for the members and to make certain decisions on behalf of the members.

As we have already seen concerning the party's decision-making structure, the Executive has a special role as the highest decision-making body in the organisation between AGMs and members meetings. In this role, it is important that the Executive takes responsibility for putting into practice the goals and positions set out in the guidelines decided and business plan adopted at the AGM, and those that are

decided at the members meetings, and to be visionary and energetic in pursuing the policy and organisational objectives of the party.

### Team work with clear roles

Once the AGM has concluded, the Executive needs to start by constituting itself. In other words, it must decide who will do what. The constitution of the party specifies the official roles on the Executive that the AGM elects. As we have seen, generally the AGM elects a number of specific functions (Chair, Secretary, etc.) and in addition a number of ordinary members without specific functions. It then becomes the task of the Executive to allocate the other roles among its elected members. This is done at a constituent meeting which should be held as soon as possible after the AGM.

However, the most important thing to bear in mind when a new Executive takes office is that the Executive is a team. You are in this together. It's a joint effort. You belong to the same party and are all driven by the ambition to do your best based on the mandate you have received from the members. Consequently, it can be useful to start the work of the Executive immediately after the AGM in order to get to know one another properly. For those who are new to the Executive, this is essential, but even for those who

have already been involved before, it can be useful and provide new insights into the people and the team that you are going to work with. In addition to presentations, this conversation might well be based on some questions:

- What are my expectations for the work of the Executive? What do I hope that my work will contribute to the organisation? What do I want to get out of it myself in terms of knowledge and new contacts?
- What skills do I have, and what skills are there in the Executive as a whole? Formal qualifications are important, but they are not the only things worth considering. Instead ask yourselves: What are we good at? What can these people sitting around the table right now do?
- What do we need to learn more about? Everyone has something to learn. If the organisation is to run a campaign, the entire Executive may need to learn more about social media, or about campaign planning and canvassing. Think broadly here. Even unanticipated skills development can turn out to be useful.
- What are the objectives of our group for the next AGM?

Then it's just a matter of starting work.

## FACTS

### ROLES IN AN EXECUTIVE

The main roles in an Executive must always be defined in the party's constitution. The number of people in a local branch Executive varies. The constitution often establishes that a Chair, a Deputy Chair, a Secretary, and a Treasurer should be elected. In addition, an Executive normally consists of between five and ten members and some substitutes.

#### Chair

The Chair leads the work of the Executive, ensures that the remainder of the members perform their duties, and is responsible for the decisions made being implemented. The Chair is the person who usually acts as the public face of the organisation and represents the organisation in contacts with other organisations or up through the levels of the party.

The Chair must keep track of the decisions made in other parts of the organisation and the status of political debate in the community as a whole. A broad knowledge of how the organisation works and its activities is also important. The Chair convenes and chairs meetings and ensures that they are conducted in a proper manner that allows everyone on the Executive to have their say.

As Chair, you do not have to be the one who does everything nor do you always have to be the public face of the Executive. Responsibility for the organisation functioning effectively is shared by many and that should also be apparent from the outside. And remember that in your role, you do not speak or act as a private individual, but as a representative of the party and its members.

The role has a special responsibility for planning and thinking long term and for maintaining a good atmosphere in the Executive so that the members cooperate well and share the work.

It goes without saying that the person who is given this role must be a person who is trusted, and who is ready to spend a great deal of time and energy on the role.

#### Deputy Chair

Much of the time, the Deputy Chair is an ordinary member of the Executive, but if the Chair should become ill or be absent for any reason, the Deputy Chair steps in and takes on the tasks of the Chair. Often the Deputy Chair also has some other function on the Executive.

#### Secretary

The Secretary works closely with the Chair. It is this function that records the minutes of the Executive's meetings, often also the members meetings, and keeps track of what decisions have been made and thus what the Executive's tasks and responsibilities are. The Secretary often deals with the



correspondence for the Executive and the organisation and is responsible for some contacts with other sections of the party and other organisations.

But the Secretary's role is far from being just an administrator. It is important that the Secretary has a thorough knowledge of the party organisation as a whole, and is able to cooperate well with the Chair without any rivalry.

The Secretary is often responsible for commissions and committees appointed by the Executive to carry out its tasks, and the Secretary might also be responsible for information to members, notices to attend meetings, and the like.

Often, the Secretary also plays a key role in the planning of policy campaigns and election campaigns when it comes to training campaign workers, developing material and planning.

The Secretary's role is perhaps the role on the Executive that can vary the most depending on the organisation's traditions and internal rules. Sometimes the role is primarily about managing the documents; sometimes the Secretary has the main responsibility for organisational matters, while the Chair is responsible for policy and external representation.

### **Treasurer**

Along with the Executive as a whole, the Treasurer has the primary responsibility for ensuring that the organisation's finances and assets are properly managed, according to the rules and the law. In a local branch, the actual bookkeeping might be the responsibility of the Treasurer; at the regional or national level, there are often financial administrators who do this. In that case, the Treasurer has overall responsibility for work on the budget and budget review.

### **Other roles**

A party organisation decides for itself what other roles there should be on an Executive. There might be a need for someone with special responsibility for educational activities, campaign work and international contacts, or someone who is in charge of recruitment and contact with the members. The organisation's actual activities should govern the roles

and their functions in an Executive. If a role exists just because that's the way things have always been done, without any specific tasks attached to the role, then it is often best to remove that role and replace it with another for which there is an actual need.

### **Members**

Those who are elected to an Executive without the AGM having assigned them specific roles become ordinary members of the Executive. These members often get their own areas of responsibility within the Executive during the financial year. In all other respects, they serve as a resource and support in the work of the Executive.

### **Substitutes**

Being a substitute means that you are the substitute for one of the elected members of the Executive. Here, what happens in practice is somewhat different in different parties and organisations. Sometimes a substitute is called to the meeting of the Executive only if an ordinary member will be absent. However, the Executive often allows the substitutes to attend all Executive meetings, with the right to speak and the right to submit proposals, but with the right to vote only when they are formally serving as a substitute for an ordinary member. The reasoning for this model is that the Executive can then be certain that the substitutes are well acquainted with the day-to-day work of the Executive and if required can easily jump in and fulfil their role as a substitute in an effective way.

### **Signing on behalf of the organisation**

The first meeting of the Executive after it has been elected at the AGM makes decisions on the positions of trust that the Executive itself is entitled to appoint. The first meeting also chooses those who will be the organisation's authorised signatories, that is, those who will be entitled to authorise (sign off on) financial expenditure and sign contracts or other legal documents on behalf of the organisation. Generally, the Chair, the Treasurer and perhaps one other person on the Executive become au-

thorised signatories. They may be authorised to sign for the organisation jointly or severally. If they are authorised to sign jointly, then at least two signatures are always required. This provides strong protection against misuse of this authorisation.

The minutes of the constituent meeting must be recorded and approved. After this, an extract from the minutes is written containing the section listing the authorised signatories for the organisation. This is then provided to the bank that needs this information.

### **Auditors**

The auditors are not part of the Executive in the formal sense, but their role is so important that it is included here anyway. They are in effect agents of the members. They audit the Executive's work. Like the Executive and the Nominating Committee, the auditors are elected at the AGM by the members of the local branch. The number of auditors is regulated in the constitution.

The auditors must be active throughout the financial year. It is important that a serious and accurate audit is done to verify the trust that the members have placed in the Executive. It is, of course, essential that a person chosen as an auditor has financial know-how in order to know what to audit.

Naturally, a person who takes on the role of auditor should be aware that they may need to criticise members of the Executive such as the Treasurer. Anyone who does not feel capable of doing this should not take on the role. ■



## The role and tasks of the Executive

The members have delegated certain powers to the Executive and there are a number of tasks that it would be impractical to try to manage at members meetings.

Each party organisation can arrive at a reasonable division of labour between the Executive and the members meetings when it comes to decision-making and planning. Members meetings and AGMs have the right to make decisions at any level of detail, but it is more practical if

decisions made there are more general in nature and the Executive is entrusted with working out the details.

Of course, the Executive can also initiate activities itself in line with the business plan and general guidelines; not everything has to be dealt with at a members meeting. It is also fully possible for the Executive to set priorities and determine themes and the like during the year. How the Executive has managed its responsibilities is, of course, reviewed at the next AGM.

One of the Executive's main overall tasks is to provide political leadership for the party organisation it leads.

The Executive is to keep itself informed about political developments in the country, region, and municipality, as well as the debate in other sections of the party. This enables the Executive to regularly discuss and formulate strategy for its level of the party organisation, as well as its priorities and activities in general, and to involve the members in these discussions and decisions.

One of the Executive's main tasks is also to always ensure that the party organisation has the most serviceable and strongest organisation possible. This includes the organisation's capacity to recruit, organise and engage its members, to get its messages across through its communication channels with the wider community and in campaigns, to fundraise, and to develop politics effectively and to develop sound policies. Another important task is to encourage engagement and ensure that all members can participate on an equal footing – regardless of gender, age, and background.

The Executive also has a special responsibility to ensure that the party organisation has the skills set and training needed so that there is a broad pool of skilled members who can take on official roles in the future – in the party and for the party in its representation in elected assemblies.

Some of the Executive's permanent tasks during the year are:

### **Execute decisions**

The broad guidelines on policy priorities and activities are decided at members meetings or AGMs. It is the responsibility of the Executive to ensure that these decisions are implemented.

An example of this might be the willingness of members to prioritise childcare issues during the financial year. It is then up to the Executive to decide how to do this, for example through drawing up policies, political manoeuvres, studies, themed meetings, discussion evenings or other outward-focused activities.

For example, if the members meeting has decided to hold a public gathering, it becomes the task of the Executive to ensure that this gathering takes place. The members of the Executive do not have to do all the work themselves, but it is the Executive that is responsible for ensuring that everything does actually get done. That the hall is booked, guest speakers are invited, information about the gathering is advertised, etc.

### **Make policy decisions**

New issues will always come up where the party will be called on to take a stand within a time frame that simply doesn't allow for members meetings to be convened, or where the issue is not of such a crucial nature that a meeting would be necessary. In this case, it is the Executive that must determine what the party line is, and this too

is a responsibility that is reviewed at the AGM when the financial year ends.

### **Represent the organisation publicly**

For many people outside the party organisation, it will be the Chair and perhaps someone else who represents the organisation. This naturally places significant demands on these individuals: they need to be capable of reaching out and representing the party in a way that is sanctioned by the members and which gives a true and fair picture of what the organisation is doing and what it stands for. This is about being visible in the mass media and making oneself visible there, working actively with social media and attending public gatherings, talking to other parties and civil society organisations, and the like.

### **Manage the party's assets**

The Executive manages the organisation's assets. Often, the day-to-day work is done by a Treasurer appointed either directly by the AGM or by a decision of the Executive. Nevertheless, the entire Executive is responsible for ensuring that the organisation's assets are managed as well as possible. At the AGM, the Executive reports on the party's finances during the financial year.

### **Keeping members informed**

Even between members meetings, it is important that members are kept up-to-date on what the Executive has decided, what is happening in the organisation and in local politics, supplied with invitations to meetings and information about what courses are available. It's a good idea for the Executive to have a well-established channel for this kind of information. This could be in the form of a regular member newsletter or a social media group where information can be spread and dialogue can arise spontaneously.

The Executive needs to regularly consider what information is important to communicate to the members. If the information is too detailed, they will get bored and stop reading it; while information that is not detailed enough may come across as meaningless, or as the Executive wanting to hide something, even if the intention is simply not to overburden the members with too much detail. Similarly, the Executive must find a way of communicating that is easy to understand but nevertheless communicates the content effectively.

### **Prepare for members meetings**

It is the Executive that prepares the issues to be dealt with at members meetings, which proposes an agenda, distributes information to the members about the time and place, and the like. The meeting always makes the decision to adopt the agenda and members may propose any additional items they wish. But the Executive always draws up the preliminary agenda.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is an Executive's most important task? Why?
- Is the Executive subordinate to or superior to the members? Is that the same in our party or not?
- What powers have the members delegated to the Executive? What powers have they not delegated?
- What is a reasonable division of labour between the Executive and the members meetings?
- What defines when they have overstepped their mandate? When is it clear that they must enlist support for their decisions from the members? Why?
- When are the members of our own local branch consulted? Does this happen regularly when it comes to crucial issues?
- How the Executive has exercised its power and responsibilities is meant to be scrutinised at each AGM by the members. Is this fully the case in practice in our own party organisation? If yes, how? If not, why not?
- How is ongoing scrutinization of the Executive's work and activities achieved? Who ensures that this functions in practice? Is that the same in our party or not?
- What constitutes a good – democratic and effective – Executive in practice? What methods does it use and what values permeate it?
- How do you create the best conditions for effective, democratic teamwork in an Executive? What is the role of the Chair and that of the other members of the Executive? What is the role of the member?
- All parties need members who are prepared to shoulder the responsibility involved in serving as a member of the Executive. How do you make this possible? And how do you make it possible for all members to do this?





# Election of representatives – and the need for representativeness

Leadership is key in all organisations, and the same is true for how the organisation chooses its executives and roles such as Chair, Secretary, and other elected officers. These are the functions that manage the day-to-day work of the party so that its organisational and political work can run successfully.

A person appointed as a delegate to a National Conference, a person serving on an Executive within the party, or a person given the task of representing the party in an elected assembly, makes decisions on behalf of others.

A political party not only has members but also voters and a wider public to take into account. Those who

are elected to leadership roles also become the public face of the party. The party will grow stronger if it elects representatives who can also win the trust of the electorate. Thus, when an organisation chooses its leaders, there are a number of different considerations to take into account.

## Five basic principles

Five principles are particularly important when electing representatives and executives. The first concerns the foundations of representative democracy. The second is about what is best for the party as a whole. The third is about all elected representatives having freedom that comes with responsibility, accountability, and trust. The fourth is that a party that wants a broad base and to engage many people must also take pains to be representative such as ensuring that there is an equal gender distribution among those who hold positions of trust. The fifth principle is that changes in the leadership of the party are natural.

### Trust of the members

Elected representatives must never forget that their power derives from the members. As an elected representative, you have been entrusted with pleading their case and leading the party organisation in the best possible way.

Thus, if a person wants to be re-elected to the same position at next year's AGM or National Conference they must retain the confidence and trust of the members. Anyone who places their own interests, wishes, or priorities – or those of any other special interests – above those of the party will do a worse job and will find it harder to get re-elected.

### What's best for the party as a whole

A person who is elected to represent the party must look to what's best for the party as a whole. In almost all cases, different groups will emerge in a party that want to promote their candidate and very often the elections will have been preceded by debates and possibly even conflicts about who should in fact be elected. This is exactly as it should be and an important part of the democratic process. However, when the vote has been taken and the decision made, the elected representative must represent everyone and, in exercising their power, take into account both the majority and the minority. One of the main tasks of the leader is to hold the party together.

This does not preclude a situation where an elected representative might be at odds with some sections of the party. AGMs and National Conferences make policy and organisational decisions after debate where it is not a given that everyone will agree about the choices made. This points to the importance of everyone in a party – not just the elected representatives – respecting the democratic process and look to what's best for the party as a whole.

### Freedom that comes with accountability and is based on trust

The Executive does not have any fixed mandates and in fact has great freedom in deciding what it will do. Decisions from members meetings and AGMs give it direc-

tion. But when the Executive meets between AGMs, it is after all the party's highest decision-making body. Being an elected representative means just what it sounds like – you are entrusted by those who voted you into office. During a term as an elected representative, lots of questions will arise where there may be no help to be had from the joint decisions made by the organisation. In leadership, there is also a responsibility to raise one sights, hold the organisation together, and take the party in the direction indicated by the overarching decisions made by the party. This may even mean that having to re-prioritise and choose different paths. If it was right or wrong of the Executive to do so will be reviewed at the next AGM or National Conference. It is a freedom that comes with accountability, where that accountability can always be tested by those who have voted you into office.

This also means that a person who is elected as a representative of the party ought to maintain a good dialogue with the members and groups within the party, even between AGMs and National Conferences. The more the party leadership listens to arguments and opinions from there, the better basis will have for making wise decisions. This dialogue can be informal, but it is also important that there are formalised ways in which the members can have input regularly during a term of office on how the party leaders ought to act, for example through regular meetings where the members can meet with their elected representatives.

### Think about who represents the party

For a party that wants to be broad-based and democratic, with many members and many active members, it is crucial to keep in mind the importance of representativeness and diversity in the various positions and official roles in the party. In all organisations and parties, there is a risk of a norm emerging for what a representative should be like, and this can place unwanted limits on who gets to be a representative or hold an official role. The norm can often be that a party representative should primarily be a middle-aged man.

In order to avoid this, the party should have an ongoing discussion about the criteria used to elect its representatives and the culture underlying the party's internal activities. You can also formalise work with gender equality and diversity. In Sweden, for example, it is inconceivable for a Nominating Committee to present a proposal that has a skewed gender distribution. A party should constantly return to questions such as: Who represents the party? Are there young people, women, and people from marginalised groups in these positions, so that all the members can be heard and identify with the party?

### Changes in the leadership are natural

Being an elected representative means a temporary trust. If the members are not satisfied with the choices that the

party leaders make or the way they lead the party, or just think that someone else is better suited to the job, it is natural that they will elect another person next time. Most of the time, such power transitions take place without any major differences of opinion or controversy being associated with them. Some parties have written into their constitutions that an elected representative may only hold the same post for a certain number of years. In other cases, it may just be that the members want to see new blood in the position in question without this meaning that the former representative had done a bad job. The less drama there is around changes in the leadership, the better it is for the party and for democracy.

## Election of representatives

There are, of course, a number of different ways of electing the party's representatives. In some political parties, they are elected by the members directly. In that case, it is not usually necessary for a Nominating Committee to prepare the election. Instead, those who are ready to take on an official role step forward and state that they are standing as candidates. They then do what they can to convince the members that they should be elected. This kind of election process should be fair and transparent. All candidates should have the same opportunities to stand for election and to campaign for themselves. Another common method is to choose a Nominating Committee, which then arrives at a proposal for who it believes can best lead the organisation and win the approval of the organisation. This proposal is then presented at the meeting and the meeting considers the Nominating Committee's proposal in relation to other candidates.

### Nominating Committees and their role

The members and active members who come to an AGM or National Conference to elect their representatives often have little opportunity at the time to become acquainted with the skills and suitability of the different candidates for a certain role. An Executive should not just be the sum total of a temporary popularity poll, but should be chosen on the basis of an overall assessment of how the Executive as a group can meet the demands and live up to the trust they are given by the members.

For this reason, many parties and organisations consider that a preparatory process is needed. This is where a Nominating Committee is useful.

The task of the Nominating Committee is to gather in the opinions and comments of the members concerning what the leadership of the party should look like before the AGM or National Conference.

Even with this kind of process, it's a good idea if the-

re are clear candidates who state that they are ready to take on an official role. In the case of a local branch, the members usually nominate their candidates, and then the Nominating Committee puts together the nominees, assesses which candidate or candidates have the strongest support, and then present a proposal for the members to vote on.

In the case of preferential voting at the regional or national level, it is often the organisational level below that nominates its candidates for the Nominating Committee to list and summarise.

A Nominating Committee should assess candidates on the basis of the skills required by an Executive and which candidates possess these skills, and how the Executive can work well together to achieve the party's objectives. A Nominating Committee should examine and evaluate the candidates nominated, both individually and on the basis of how they might cooperate with and complement each other, and then present a well thought-out and balanced proposal. In other words, the Nominating Committee has two tasks:

- 1 To put forward a proposal for the best possible Executive
- 2 To present a proposal that can be broadly supported by the members.

Ideally, these two tasks coincide to a large extent. However, often the organisational level below also has requirements other than that the best candidates should be elected, and it may well be that the Nominating Committee does not think that the candidate who is most likely to get the support of the members is the optimum candidate. As a rule, in such situations the Nominating Committee attempts to defuse the situation by presenting the best candidate, who is likely to get the support of the members. After all, the two tasks are linked: an Executive that cannot rally the members will find it difficult to perform the role they need to have in the organisation.

The Nominating Committee also needs to take the long-term view with its proposal. Everyone needs time to grow into a new role and gain experience. This can be a strong argument for electing an 'inexperienced' person, with a view to allowing that person to grow and develop into a very strong option for the next term of office.

### Composition of the Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee's proposal is just that: a proposal, not a directive. However, the goal of the Nominating Committee's work must always be to put forward a proposal that will be likely be supported by the members. Sometimes this process is interpreted as the decision being handed down from above, and that the members must vote in favour of the Nominating Committee's proposal without objection.

This might well be the case in some instances. But it might also be that the Nominating Committee has simply done its job. That it has identified which candidates have the highest level of trust in the organisation and therefore have the support of the members.

For the Nominating Committee to be able function in this way, it is also necessary that its own composition is broad and diverse and reflective of the organisation. If it is, many of the conflicts that would otherwise arise at the AGM can be resolved at this stage.

Nevertheless, the AGM or National Conference is always sovereign in making the actual decision. If any person or group within the party would prefer to see a different composition of the Executive than the Nominating Committee proposes, they can always put forward counter proposals at the AGM. Anyone who wants to has the right to stand as a candidate. The meeting will then vote on the matter.

It is the AGM/National Conference that has ultimate responsibility for who is elected. Those who participate in a preferential vote are equally responsible for their votes and their votes have the same value, whether based on their own knowledge of the candidates, on trust in the Nominating Committee, or on anything else.

### *The work of a Nominating Committee*

For the work of a Nominating Committee to function as it should, there needs to be a level of trust in them and their work, that they will arrive at a good and right-minded proposal. The Nominating Committee should be representative and its working methods and mandate should be well anchored within the organisation. Here are some tips on how its work can best be done:

- 1** It is important that everyone in the organisation is aware of the steps that are taken in preparing nominations. This means that the Chair of the Nominating Committee should keep the members of the party up-to-date on progress and when individual members and various party bodies are expected to be active in the process.
- 2** It is good if the members can be involved in shaping the criteria for the kind of candidate to look for and how the work should be done. It is also good to have a well-known code of conduct and to use clear language in an election process.
- 3** Closed processes fuel speculation and unnecessary spreading of rumours, which is counter-productive to the development of a transparent party culture with a modern leadership.
- 4** Party members who are themselves on an Executive or who stand as candidates for an official role should not be part of the Nominating Committee. Nor should their close relatives generally speaking.
- 5** Especially in the local branch, a party should avoid the same person holding too many official roles.

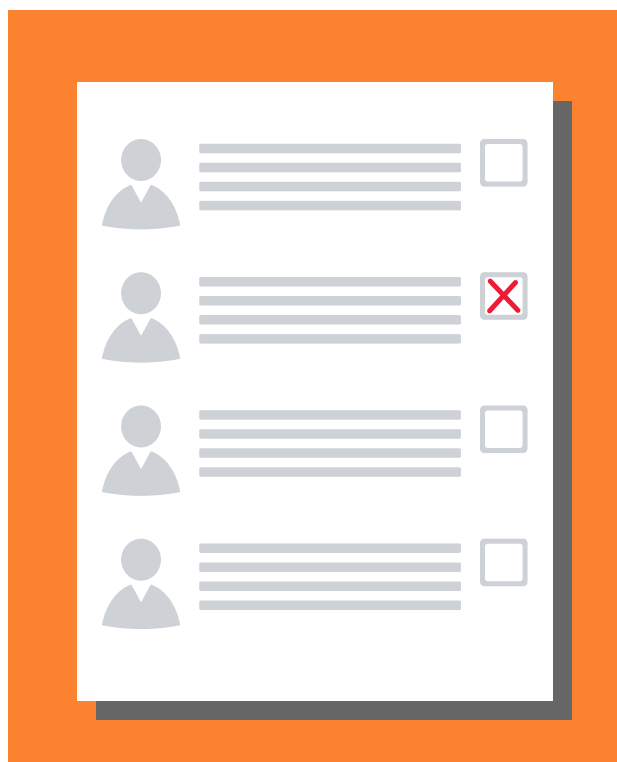
- 6** When actually producing proposals for party representatives, it is useful to do in-depth interviews with those who are proposed as candidates. This applies to new candidates as well as those who have already been in office for some time but are seeking re-election.

### *The nominations process*

In principle, the nominations process function in the same way, regardless of the level in the party. One thing that can be different however is who can nominate candidates. At the local branch level, all members have the right to nominate candidates for an official role. At the regional level, it is often the local branches that nominate candidates. At the national level, it is the regional party organisations that nominate the candidates.

The Nominating Committee ought to have a deadline when all nominations must have been received, so that it can have time to interview all the nominees. Once the Nominating Committee has submitted its proposal, members are free to submit other proposals. The meeting decides when it's time to move to a decision.

Nominations are proposals and should not be viewed as an informal vote or a trial election. A Nominating Committee can and should of course consider whether a candidate will have broad support, but since in general only a minority utilise their entitlement to nominate candidates, more or less coordinated campaigns for certain individuals – or pure coincidence – can give a misleading picture of the actual support for the candidates. A controversial individual with weak support can get far more nominations than someone with broad support who most regard as an 'obvious' choice.



# The importance of representativeness

All members of a democratic organisation, regardless of gender, ethnicity, social class, or sexual orientation, have the same right to make their voices heard and the same right to be elected to, an official role. This is a rights issue.

It is also about combating discrimination. Discrimination is never acceptable. One of the most fundamental criteria for democracy is that all citizens should have the same opportunity to make their voices heard and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. This democratic aim must also include those groups in the population which have traditionally been excluded from power and influence. Some of the ways in which the party can ensure that it does include these groups is to:

- Establish policies on gender equality and diversity.
- Institute quotas.
- Maintain a lively debate at all times to raise awareness about discrimination.

In all democratic organisations, it is important that the leadership chosen reflects both the organisation itself and the society from which it comes. This is also a matter of representativeness, of the importance of clearly showing that the party is a party for all people.

A good distribution of people from different backgrounds and groups allows more people to recognise themselves in the party and to trust the party. That makes it easier to engage a broad group of citizens and, above all, it increases the chances that the party can benefit from the range of experiences of a broad group in formulating policy that is positive and relevant for all citizens.

Aren't merit and skills enough? Yes, of course, merit and skills are the most important question. When you are going to appoint a representative, you must always ask questions such as: Is the person fit for the job? Can we expect them to take on the role in the way that we expect? The Executive and the elected functions within the leadership group should not be interpreted as a representation of different groups chosen on the basis of some kind of mathematical formula. The best Executive should be elected and it is important to evaluate both:

- 1 The candidates' competence.
- 2 How the individual candidate will work with the others in the Executive.

However, competence is rarely a simple, objective criterion. All too often, we allow old habits, stereotypes, and prejudices to govern who we elect to executives and

official roles. At a more fundamental level, it is often about power structures in which a certain group of people are the norm and other groups find it difficult to be admitted to the group and participate. Therefore, anyone involved in appointing an Executive should ask themselves questions such as:

- What competence?
- Competence for what?
- In what context?
- What voices are we forgetting if we only think about this in the same way as we always have?

It is also about the party's image. Is the party exclusively for men who are middle-aged or older? What do our executives look like? Who make their voices heard in meetings and gatherings? Have we done enough to create room for all groups in the party?

## Factors to include

The question of the representativeness of the leadership is a matter that is absolutely crucial to a party's internal democratic decision-making processes and to the party's aim to give a voice to groups that would otherwise not find it easy to be heard in politics.

The following are some of the factors that should be taken into account when the Nominating Committee chooses candidates and when parties appoint their representatives, executives, and other elected representatives.

### Gender

Unlike many other groups and identities that are included when we are assessing the degree of representativeness in political systems, women are not a minority group. On the contrary, women represent the majority of the population in most societies. Yet women are often marginalised in political decision-making processes. The stereotypical picture of a politician is of a man and throughout the world political systems and parties are dominated by a kind of old-boys network that women find it difficult to break into. Many women often also bear a greater share of the responsibility for the family and home, which reduces the time they can spend on political meetings and activities. All parties should be striving to change this situation. Firstly because women have the same rights as men to participate in political processes, and secondly because when both men and women are represented it enriches politics and the organisation as well. Studies and experience show, for example, that women are more active in networks in general in civil society – in activist groups and organisations besides political parties. They are a resource and a force that politics cannot neglect.

There are many ways to increase women's influence. Electoral systems can be made more accessible to women,



seats on executives can be more evenly distributed, and candidates can be more evenly distributed between men and women, etc. The Social Democrats in Sweden have a rule that every other name on their lists in elections should be a man and every other name should be a woman.

Too many parties choose not to prioritise this issue. They do only what the law or the rules require, no more and no less. But a progressive party must often do more to practise what it preaches about democracy and equality, and the most effective way of achieving change is to build gender equality into its own decision-making structures and organisational culture.

### **Age**

It is often said that young people are not interested in becoming engaged in political parties. That they don't form their political world view in the same way as older generations or that they don't want to commit themselves to one and the same organisation for any length of time. But contrary to this, most of the world's political protest movements are initiated by young people, and all the studies show that young people are both knowledgeable about and interested in politics. Perhaps it is the traditional political parties that need to change so that young people will feel more at home as part of them?

A party that is not actively involved in recruiting young people – and electing them to official roles – risks sooner or later becoming obsolete and dying out. As with women's representation, there are different ways of working actively on this issue. One way might be for the party to decide that a certain proportion of all elected political roles should be held by individuals below a certain age. For example, the Social Democrats in Sweden have said that at least 25 per cent of all those on their lists of candidates should be under the age of 35. What's important is that the party works actively to renew itself and get young people into its executives and into positions of trust. Because it is not enough to just let them be involved as trainees who will 'learn the ropes' over time. Most people today have good knowledge of their own circumstances and the society in which they live. Most people who become

engaged in a political party want to be involved in changing things – not wait for years 'watching and learning' before they can have a real influence.

### **Ethnicity**

Most countries and communities are made up of many different ethnic groups and people who identify strongly with their background or culture. In multi-ethnic societies, it is important for a party that wants to represent the whole population to ensure that there are representatives from these groups in the party's decision-making bodies. If ethnic minorities perceive that the party is only for the majority ethnic group, it will be difficult to convince them of the good intentions of the party.

### **Geography**

During elections, debate often arises about geographical representation, partly because the party organisation is often based on geographical boundaries, and partly because the community as a whole is too, and geographical belonging often shapes part of people's identity. The citizens in a district or region, or the division that the party happens to have there, often demand representation at the national level because they feel that their geographical area is important to them. In many federated parties, this even becomes the most important selection criteria. All the party's regional organisations should have 'their' representatives in the party leadership. All local branches should have 'their' representatives in the regional organisation and so on.

It is reasonable for a Nominating Committee to take such geographical considerations into account, and most often they actually do so. Having broad geographical representation is a strength for an Executive and also provides a broad knowledge of the conditions in different parts of its catchment area. In many countries, geographical and ethnic identities coincide. An ethnic group that is in a minority nationally might be in the majority in a regional or local context. It is important to emphasise here that the ambition for breadth at the national level should be the same at these levels as well.

## Social class

In social democratic parties, with their traditional base in the working class, there is often discussion about the composition of an Executive on the basis of the social classes represented. There is strength in having a broad range of groups represented in the leadership of the party organisation – from a democratic perspective, but also to aid the development of its policies and its credibility with different social groups.

A social democratic party that wants to represent workers and ordinary people in a society should avoid to solely be represented by academics to the exclusion of all others. This does not mean that all the party's representatives must come from the working class. There may of course be many good reasons for electing people from many social groups, and this is an aspect that the Nominating Committee and the members would do well to consider when discussing leadership candidates.

## Opinions

Finally, a broad-based party must also allow a broad range of opinions to be expressed. There are almost always different groups within a party who rally around some issue that they want to pursue within the party. There is a point to taking into account that the party has a diversity of opinions when electing the Executive and party leaders.

One advantage of having a broad range of views in a political Executive is that it can stimulate constructive debate resulting in a more clear-sighted outcome than it might have been otherwise. But there is also a risk of paralysis in the Executive where policy conflicts are too great, resulting in a kind of trench warfare between different political factions. To avoid this, it is important that the Executive maintains an open and humble attitude to its work, that everyone understands that the Executive represents the party as a whole, and that it is the AGMs and National Conferences that establish the policy line. This is the framework within which everyone on an Executive has to operate.

Having said that, it is also important to emphasise that, once elected, the Executive represents the whole organisation. No one sitting on an Executive should see themselves as just the 'voice' of their own geographical area, or of their own level within the organisation, or of their own group on the Executive.



## CHECKLIST FOR INCREASING THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN A PARTY

What can be done right now to increase women's representation in your party? Shannon O'Donnell, Policy Advisor on Gender Issues, has made a checklist that can be useful vary in mind in this context, and these points can also be applied to including other groups that have previously struggled to find a place in politics.

1. Analyse what structures in the current organisation might be preventing women from participating on equal terms. Such structures certainly do exist. It might be a matter of money – that in fact it costs money to stand for election to an official role. It might be about time – that the party holds meetings at times that suit men better. Or it might be about something else.
2. Identify what you really need to do to provide scope for women to become more engaged in the party. Be concrete. The Labor Party in Australia have a rule that says that no gender may be represented by less than 40 per cent of the party's candidates in elections. The National Action Party in Mexico has developed a system for finding candidates of both sexes and has a training programme specifically for women. It is crucial that the organisation builds awareness of the importance of equal representation between men and women, and finds strategies to reduce the gap that is all too often evident today.
3. Analyse what the informal processes are in the party for choosing candidates. The more powerful these informal processes are, the greater the risk that groups that are already under represented will stay that way.
4. Is the climate for discussion in your party open and welcoming, and does it provide scope for new candidates and active members of the party to contribute? If instead the climate is one where an aggressive tone, confrontation and antagonism get results, you most likely have more problems in your party than that women are not represented. But it is also an established fact that this kind of party culture often shuts out women in particular.
5. How does the party leadership behave? Including new groups is an issue for the entire organisation but it also a fact that change is simpler if it is actively pursued by the party's leaders.
6. Make a plan. And write it down. Conscious change requires a conscious and structured approach.
7. And don't forget that work to include women and other under-represented groups is actually about making the party stronger and better. It is not always an easy job, but it is always worth the effort.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is leadership so key in all organisations – and how the organisation chooses its executives and roles such as Chair, Secretary, and other elected representatives?
- Who ultimately chooses those who are elected to Executive posts? What are the electoral processes in our own party's organisation? How are candidates nominated, chosen, and elected?
- What is the primary task of the Nominating Committee, and what is not its task? How does a successful Nominating Committee work in practice? Why?
- What are the benefits of nominations processes in choosing the leadership? What can be the drawbacks? How can one get around these?
- Why is it important for an elected representative to look to what's best for the whole party? What are the consequences if they do not do so?
- Why is it important that the leadership of a party is representative? What does this mean in practice? How does it work in our party?
- What is the point of the Executive and the party's elected representatives reflecting both its own organisation and that of the community? Under what circumstances can these two aims oppose each other?
- Which groups often have to stand back when the party's leaders and representatives are elected? What is the situation in our own party organisation?
- How well are women and young people represented in our party? How does this influence the party's policies and activities?
- What are the consequences for these groups – in everyday life, and for their confidence in the party and ultimately in democracy?
- What can we do in the party in practice to increase women's and young people's participation and visibility so that they are both seen and heard in the party? What practical rules, processes and bodies do we ourselves have for increasing the participation of these groups in the political process? Are they working? If not, why not?
- Why is having the trust of members key for those who want to take on an official role in a democratic party? Who determines when this trust has been forfeited, and how?
- Being an elected representative means that the members have invested their trust in you temporarily. How can we best ensure natural changes in leadership and avoid conflicts?





# Organisational culture and democratic leadership

In previous chapters, we have examined a number of formal factors that are important for a democratic party to be able to elect representatives and formulate policy platforms and policies. This kind of formality is needed to ensure that everyone can make their voice heard, on equal terms, and that everyone knows how decisions are going to be made.

But the decision-making processes of a party and its internal democracy are not just about formal structures. It's also about something more subtle – how we behave in relation to each other.

It's about what organisational culture we have, and what kind of leadership characterizes our organisation. Both these factors are many times more important

to the direction of the party than even the formal structures, and they affect how well its formal structures function.

# What is an organisational culture?

The culture of an organisation is the sum total of the basic assumptions, values and norms shared by the people in the organisation. These can be expressed or unconscious, but they nevertheless permeate our views and behaviours, and thus also guide how we act and interact with each other. On the everyday level, they affect how well people cooperate in the party organisation. Do we have a good culture that encourages people to express their opinions, give feedback and air different perspectives? Do we see and hear each other and give each other praise and support? This increases the organisation's efficiency and strength. And that boosts its capacity to function as a democratic organisation.

But what happens if in practice we don't follow the democratic norms and values that we talk about? Ultimately, if we don't practice what we preach it doesn't matter how many rules and policies we put into writing or dress up in fine words. The end result is bound to be something different from what we intended.

It might be something as simple as how we choose to respond to each other when someone has done something good, or something that we feel is less good. It might be about who gets to speak at meetings or gets positions of trust. It could be about the tone we use or – to take something that is both trivial and important at the same time – how much we laugh when we work together in the organisation.

An organisation's culture is often symbolised by an onion. Its outer layer contains such things as financial resources, human resources, the constitution, the know-how of those who are active in the organisation and policy

platforms and arguments. At its core are the vision, values, and identity of the organisation – which form the basis for the common views and opinions and priorities of the organisation – and which therefore affect and permeate all the external layers.

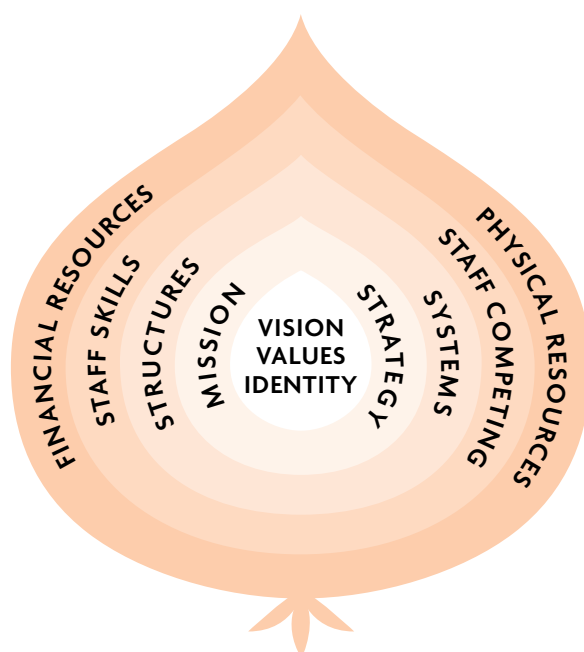
To some, this might sound like abstract mumbo jumbo. How on earth can we influence this? Surely a culture and a climate of cooperation are organic? Surely these are not things that you can decide in advance.

At one level, these objections are valid. If there is a pattern in the organisation where, for example, individuals regularly belittle one another, it is often not enough simply to get-together for a joint meeting and decide that this should cease. Changing an organisational culture is not an easy process. But it is possible.

## Our organisational culture

In order for a party to be able to establish itself, grow and become strong, it needs to be supported by an affirmative and open organisational culture that includes rather than excludes people. A culture in which people are seen and heard, respected, and involved. A culture that cultivates what is meaningful about being politically engaged, and where people can work together effectively and grow together.

Ultimately, everyone who is active in an organisation bears a responsibility for the culture that exists in that organisation. It isn't decided somewhere at the top of the organisation. The culture of an organisation is developed by each individual in their interactions with the other individuals in the organisation. In everyday meetings, conversations, and work.



The Onion Model (Source: Intrac)

This is not to say that the formally elected leaders of the organisation have a particularly important role to play. They act as role models and can set boundaries on what is okay and what is not okay. The organisation's leaders can work toward an organisational culture that provides equal scope for all, regardless of background, age, gender, or sexual orientation. This is a choice that leaders must make. It requires a well-considered view on what kind of climate of cooperation to encourage and how this is to be encouraged. And it always starts with the organisation's fundamental values.

### **Fundamental values rule**

A democratic view of the organisation is based on a simple but important motto: Practice what you preach.

People's faith in the party will be damaged unless the actions of its leaders or members are connected with what they say, what they are, and what they stand for. If there is no such connection, confusion easily arises, both inside and outside the party organisation, and people's faith in the party wanes.

It is fundamentally a question of ideology – the values and views that we want to see in our society at large – democracy, equality, justice – must also be visible in our words and actions in our party.

It might therefore be appropriate to point out what these fundamental values stand for when we work together in a social democratic party:

- All people are equally valuable and have an equal right to be different. Every human being is a unique, thinking, and reflective individual.
- People are social beings with the capacity and will to grow and develop, have an influence, and take responsibility. We are all dependent on each other, and we need to meet with and interact with others in order to develop, learn new things, and grow as individuals.
- Where democratic processes and gatherings are welcoming and supportive, and encourage curiosity and asking questions, people are empowered. This kind of environment fosters dialogue, learning and knowledge, and thus also the individual.
- Everyone should have the same right and opportunity to have an influence; everyone has the same obligation to take responsibility.

Based on these values, we can conclude that the party should be a welcoming and open place for respectful meetings and cooperation on equal terms. A party organisation that is characterised by participation and joint responsibility – with a strong sense that what we decide together, we do together. There should be zero tolerance for discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, and any form of abuse.

## **Methods for working with the organisational culture**

Understanding what kind of organisational culture we want is the first step in a process to develop our way of being and functioning in the organisation.

The second step is to analyse the culture we have at the moment. Are we doing things right?

The third is about identifying the tools to change. Below are some basic building blocks that can be useful to have in your toolbox moving forward.

### ***Reward the right things***

In an organisation, meetings and interactions occur all the time and the way we behave towards each other in each and every one of these meetings and interactions has repercussions on what we do and how we behave in the future. The behaviours we want to reward must therefore be taken into account and strengthened by giving them positive consequences in everyday life. A culture only changes through systematically working to encourage and facilitate new desirable behaviours.

### ***An affirmative atmosphere***

If we are to practise what we preach, we must create an organisation in which we make the most of everyone's commitment, thoughts, and ideas. Different views must not be seen as a threat. Assume that anyone who has a different position is well-meaning. You all have the same goals with the organisation. Different opinions are part of a constructive dialogue that leads to a better conversation and, in the long run, a better organisation and policies. Feedback is also important. Has someone in your organisation done something good? Acknowledge it! Praise the person. Make it known, not just to the person who did the good thing but to everyone else as well. And explain why it was good. The importance of positive feedback cannot be overestimated.

In too many organisations, positive efforts are taken for granted, and people only provide negative criticism. Criticism is an important aspect of a positive working atmosphere, but it becomes destructive if it is just about what has gone wrong. Praise creates a positive atmosphere, which leads to more praise, and people grow and develop more easily.



When you give negative criticism, remember that it should be constructive and answer questions such as: Can we improve? Why did it turn out wrong? What can we do differently in the future?

It might be useful to bear in mind that constructive criticism is always better and more useful if you make it concrete rather than abstract, and don't put the entire blame on the person you are giving feedback to. Emphasise how you yourself are affected by things being done in one way or another instead of saying "you're doing this or that wrong". Feedback that comes out of a 'we' perspective often carries more weight than saying "you ought to have done things differently".

### ***Clear roles***

Clear roles for the different levels in the organisation facilitate a good organisational culture, so that everyone has the same expectations and can pull in the same direction. This requires clear decision-making paths and democratic structures. That's right, structures also influence the organisational culture, just as the organisational culture influences its structures. The relationship is in both directions.

### ***The importance of the leadership***

Everyone has a responsibility for the organisational culture. There is no one else who can fix what we do and how we behave. But that doesn't prevent the leadership of an organisation from playing a particularly great role. It is the organisation's leadership that bears the ultimate responsibility. An engaged leadership who are aware of the significance of the organisation's culture, who aim

for empowered members and a conversation in which the organisation's values are kept alive in everyday life.

A leadership who demonstrate in their own actions what it means to live up to the formulations on democracy and empowerment in policy platforms. A leadership who work actively against master suppression techniques and other methods where members are suppressed and rendered unable to strengthen their own authority within the organisation. We deal more with leadership in the next chapter.

### ***Ongoing, lively discussion***

A lively discussion about the norms and values that the organisation's membership wants to permeate the organisation. Take nothing for granted! It is important to remember that norms and values are constantly changing in the society at large, and it is not obvious that the organisation that you are a part of has kept up with these changes. Be open to new input, thoughts, and opinions. And that applies to the organisation's vision – what we aim to be – and to the analysis – what we are like today.

When new active members come in, they look at the organisation with new eyes. Structures and patterns that those members who were already active in the party take for granted may be questionable or dysfunctional, but that is just 'the way we do things'. Not every new thought or idea is good or well thought out of course, but a lively and affirmative organisational culture must make use of all viewpoints that can develop the organisation and this cannot be evaluated unless you listen to everyone and take everyone equally seriously.

## THE MASTER SUPPRESSION TECHNIQUES

Master suppression techniques are techniques that a group or person uses to emphasise or enhance their position in a hierarchy by undermining other groups or individuals. It's important to note that master suppression techniques are rarely used consciously. They arise because of a certain culture within an organisation. Often also a patriarchal structure. It can be about how you behave towards each other in meetings, in conversations, around the dinner table, or in other situations in an organisation. The prevalence of master suppression techniques says a lot about the organisation's culture, and they impact women, the young, and marginalised groups more frequently. That is why they have also become an important component in tackling patriarchal structures.

### MAKING INVISIBLE

You say something, but no one seems to care. Others have their arguments responded to and discussed – for or against – but in your case, nothing happens at all. Another example is someone choosing to read something on their phone or start talking to someone else while you are talking. Or that someone else takes the credit for something that you have said or done. Not being seen or taken seriously makes you feel unimportant in your group.

**What to do:** If someone in your environs is being made invisible, demonstrate this by referring to that person yourself. Take up the example that the person has given and speak for or against it. If the invisibility is very obvious, draw attention to it. For example: "Why do you have to read something on your phone just when I'm talking?" Or: "That was my idea from the start, but it's great that you have picked it up now".

### RIDICULE

When what someone says is ridiculed and turned into a joke at the expense of the speaker. This might also be about the person using the master suppression technique to shift the focus from what someone says to their clothes, appearance, sexuality or the person's experience and habits. For example: "You're here for the first time so you might want to take it easy with the criticism."

**What to do:** One way is to ask the person who ridiculed another a direct question. What do you mean by that? Do you think my clothes are relevant in this con-

text? In what way is my experience of any relevance to my argument? It's a good idea if someone else in the group can do this who is aware that the ridicule has belittled the person.

### WITHHOLD INFORMATION

We all know what this is about. You come to a meeting, and it turns out that some people in the meeting have already discussed the issue and have more information about it than you do. Some people get more information – consciously or unconsciously – than others, and the effect of this is that there is an A and a B team in the group.

**What to do:** Strengthen internal communications. Investigate which channels are informal and which everyone shares. Here the formal structures of the organisation can assist in thwarting master suppression techniques.

### DOUBLE BIND

This is a particularly cruel master suppression technique. It aims to trigger the person's own feelings of inadequacy. That you can't cope with everything that needs to be done. A classic double bind is: "I told you so! You didn't have time to do this because you have too much to do elsewhere!" This is most often used in relation to women's commitments to family, work, and politics.

**What to do:** Immediately take up the question of whether the criticism is reasonable. Clarify your own priorities, so that everyone understands why you didn't manage in time. All of us have many different priorities, things that

have to be done in different parts of our lives. If a person can't be a person with an everyday life to manage and also be part of the party, how should we organise ourselves so that this does become possible?

### HEAP BLAME/PUT TO SHAME

This is about insinuating that a victim is themselves to blame for their situation. If someone has been joking in a sexist or denigrating way, it is waved aside with: "Can't you take a joke"? As if it were the victim's fault for having reacted. Or if someone is hurt: "You get upset over the slightest thing!" Heaping blame/putting to shame is a subtle master suppression technique based on the idea that a person's reactions are wrong or somehow less appropriate than others.

**What to do:** If someone is exposed to this, affirm the person instead. Say that their reaction is okay. Try to get a clear picture of the actual circumstances. Make it apparent who has caused the problem, not just who reacted to it. Go through what has happened with others.

A general way to respond to these master suppression techniques is to learn them. To analyse when they are used, and discuss with the others in the party and the group how you should respond to them. You don't always have to respond to them with condemnation. People who use them might be doing so out of habit or lack of forethought. But it might also be a calculated way of strengthening their position by undermining other people in the party. ■



## A democratic leadership

Being an elected representative and leader of a party driven by an idea and a vision.  
Representing others who want the same things, pulling in the same direction.  
It's a big thing. It's important.

Ultimately, a party lives or dies on trust. It is trust that determines whether people will vote for the party, and even more so if they will become involved in it. That trust is largely borne by the people who represent the party. The party's credibility stands or falls on their way of being – if it lives up to its ideas and values.

How the leaders of parties take on their roles is therefore crucial. And not just the leaders. This applies to the party as a whole.

Just as the organisation culture must, the leadership must act and behave in line with the party's values and human vision. In previous sections, we have looked at the role of the leader in creating a good atmosphere, a stimulating and creative environment, and being inclusive as a leader. As we have seen, everyone in an organisation bears a responsibility for the organisation culture of the party, but those elected as its leaders have a special responsibility.

There are a number of different leadership functions in a party. You can be the chair or sit on the Executive of a local branch; you might be the party's representative in a local or regional parliament; or you might sit in the national parliament. You might lead a commission or a working party or an election campaign.

In all these contexts, it matters what kind of leadership we use, and it is important that the party has a united view of what kind of leadership should permeate the party.

A social democratic leadership can be summarised with some key words that are also found in the leadership training programmes developed by Sweden's Social Democratic party.

- 1 Democratic.** A leader should give everyone the chance to speak and evaluate everyone's arguments on the same basis. Decision-making processes must be transparent and predictable. This increases people's sense of empowerment and that we stand behind the decisions and the organisation – together.
- 2 Visibility and encouragement.** We believe in people's capacity to want to grow and develop in new and old tasks.
- 3 Courageous and safe.** We stand up for each other and support each other. If someone makes a mistake, we provide constructive criticism, but we are nonetheless therefore each other as fellow members of the party. We don't back down from taking action even on difficult issues.
- 4 Visionary and persevering.** The movement's vision of what kind of society we want is central and we act in a way that enables us to stand by what we have done. This applies to the policy content and how we behave towards each other.

There are, of course, a number of different methods and ways of working that are better or worse for developing a democratic leadership. Just as is the case with many other things related to policy and organisational development, it is about an ongoing discussion about leadership in the organisation. Those who have a leadership role in the party ought to be offered training in leadership and platforms where they can converse with others about their role as leaders. Even those who have been leaders for some time need this kind of knowledge and these kinds of conversations.

Some methods in particular should be included in such conversations. According to the Swedish Social Democratic party's leadership training programmes, leadership should be characterised by:

### *A consultative approach*

The role of the leader is not always to be the one who 'shines' or does all the important things. Instead, the task is often to support and promote others, to listen and to have confidence in everyone's ability to solve problems and take responsibility.

### *Delegation and involvement*

In many groups, situations can arise where a few people do a lot and others feel that their capacities are underutilised. Good leadership delegates to all and ensures that everyone has meaningful tasks that suit them. For the work to be engaging and done efficiently, the division of labour needs to be clear and those who are given a task need to have some room to manoeuvre so that they can make decisions on what methods to use themselves. Believe in people's abilities. A person who finds their own path to a goal will grow as a result of the task. This means that the leader has almost a guiding role. Resist the urge to micromanage – support instead. It is also important that the jobs that nobody really wants to do are shared as evenly as possible among all the individuals in the group.



### *Ethics and morality*

We have already discussed politics as being about trust, and that trust is about behaving ethically and upholding moral standards, both as representatives of the organisation and as individuals. If you behave inappropriately in private, it can harm the party and its policies. Honesty and transparency are a good basic rule. Don't let your own interests get mixed up with those of your organisation. And always discuss openly and with eyes wide open whether there is reason to suspect that this has occurred.

### *Evaluate*

A good organisation is an organisation that learns from its mistakes, as well as from what worked well. Always include follow-ups and evaluations. What worked? What could we do differently?

It is important that such evaluations are carried out without fear or favour. In an organisational culture where people are afraid of making mistakes, they often end up becoming defensive if they receive even the slightest criticism. This kind of attitude inhibits the development of the organisation. It can be counteracted by a leadership that affirms what has gone well, and provides constructive but not personal criticism when things have not gone as well as hoped or anticipated. This kind of organisation is a joy to work in.

### *Meetings that lead forward*

We have already addressed the issue of meetings, but we have come back to it again here because it is often a very concrete way for a leader to influence the culture of the organisation. Meetings should be an important part of the work process. If those who come to a meeting feel that it was a waste of time, this creates a bad atmosphere and it will be more difficult to get them to come to meetings in the future. A good meeting uses the combined experience and skills of the group to develop an activity or views on a particular issue.

### *Renewal and development*

A social democratic party that never rethinks its positions and policy platforms will stagnate and lose members and support. Good leadership is therefore also about creating arenas for debate on the party's direction, where the members and active members can discuss the best way to get there, based on the party's vision and goals. Criticism of the current policy line should not be seen as a threat, but as the desire to get involved and improve the party's policies. It is also vital that there are opportunities for individuals to grow and develop, by trying out different activities and responsibilities than those they have had before. By taking courses and learning more. This is how the opportunities for new leaders to emerge in the party are expanded.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is an organisational culture and why is it key to a party's activities, decision-making processes, and internal democracy?
- What is a negative, toxic, and undemocratic organisational culture? What are its features, and what consequences do they have? What is a good, democratic, and successful organisational culture? Why?
- An undemocratic and negative organisational culture often features the incidence and the use of master suppression techniques, What are they and are they something that we ourselves have encountered in the party's activities? When? What is the best way to respond to master suppression techniques?
- Why is it important to practise what you preach? In what way is the issue of how we relate to each other in the party and to our constituents fundamentally a matter of ideology? What happens if there is a disconnect between what we say and what we do?
- What is a social democratic organisational culture? How is the social democratic ideology related to this and its values?
- What is the organisational culture like in our own local branch? What are its good points? What are its negative sides? What consequences do these have? What do we mainly need to develop in our culture in order to become stronger, more democratic, and more successful?
- How can we work in practice to develop our own culture and a climate that encourages cooperation? What are the important steps in this?
- Who is ultimately responsible for the culture we have in our party? What role does the leadership have? Why?
- What are the features of a democratic leadership, and why is it important for a democratic and successful organisation and how the organisation makes decisions?



**Photo:**

page 1: Shutterstock

page 4: Mikael Landelius

page 5: Ida Borg

page 6: Martin Hörner Kloo

page 8, 9, 10: Anders Löwdin

page 11: Mikael Kristenson/Unsplash

page 12: Annie Spratt/Unsplash

page 16: Shutterstock

page 19, 23: Ellen Aguirre

page 24: Shutterstock

page 27: Dylan Gillis/Unsplash

page 30: Victor Svedberg

page 31: Ida Borg

page 33: Michal Matlon/Unsplash

page 38: Priscilla Du Preez/Unsplash

page 41: Brooke Cagle/Unsplash

page 44: Ellen Aguirre

page 46: Mikael Landelius

page 47: Jessica Da Rosa/Unsplash

## **An introductory course in how to run and represent a party**

Democratic parties in different parts of the world can learn a lot from each other's experiences and practices. This module deals with questions related to democratic parties being able to work at a fundamental level, to deliver and to create order and stability. It is about the party's internal democratic processes. How the party chooses representatives and leaders. How to work in concrete terms to reconcile and reach democratic and legitimate decisions.

Well-functioning internal democracy lifts a party. It makes the party stronger, more durable, and more viable. It is what makes the party ultimately able to meet the electorate with credibility and energy and demand democracy, the rule of law, and equality in the society as a whole.

The goal of this module is to increase your knowledge of these questions so that you are able to participate in developing the party's activities and apply internal democracy within the party in which you are active.

You can read more about the introductory course and find all its modules here:

**[www.palmecenter.se/palmeacademy](http://www.palmecenter.se/palmeacademy)**

