Types of Problems Advisors Face in their Role

1. **Leadership Problems**
   a. **The leader does not consult with the organization before making significant decisions.**
      i. Have a meeting with the leader to discuss the importance of consensus building and developing ownership in members by letting them be part of the decision-making process.
   b. **The leader appears incompetent because he/she does not have self-confidence, is non-assertive, and lacks interest in the organization.**
      i. Since the rest of the organization looks to the leader for direction and support, try to work closely with the leader to develop his/her skills and confidence. If the leader lacks interest in his/her position, ask why he/she is in the position and help him/her to see how he/she is affecting the organization.
   c. **A rivalry exists between leaders in the organization.**
      i. Depending on the situation, the advisor can meet with the leaders to talk through how things are working within the organization and lead the conversation to the leadership of the organization and have them reflect on their roles and effectiveness as leaders. Highlight some of the issues within the organization and ask each of them how they can help to resolve what is going on. Let them take ownership of their actions.
      ii. A more passive way to handle this situation is to do a team-building exercise with the leaders or a personality assessment, which will allow the leaders to see the various roles that are needed to make a group work, as well as the preferences of each personality type.
   d. **The leader is overloaded with work and has too many time conflicts.**
      i. Many student leaders take on too much. When you see that a leader is overloaded, talk about it and see how you can help, but don't take on the student's responsibilities for him/her. Teach him/her about the importance of delegation or time management or selecting the most important things to be a part of…even if it means you'll lose him/her as the leader of the group.

2. **Membership Problems**
   a. **Low attendance at meetings.**
      i. There are three basic reasons why attendance at meetings can be consistently low: (1) the organization has not recruited many members; (2) the meetings are not well run; or (3) the members do not feel a vested interest in the organization because they have not helped to produce or do anything. It could also be a combination of these things. The first step is to identify what is, or is not, happening, and then determine how the organization can fix the problem.

[Adapted from: Lorenz, N. & Shipton, W. (1984). A Practical Approach to Group Advising and Problem Solving. A Handbook for Student Group Advisers. Schuh, J.H. (Ed.). American College Personnel Association.]

b. **Members have low satisfaction and morale, are bored, do not communicate well, feel left out, are apathetic, or appear to be incompetent.**
   i. Start with the leaders because these are the students that the other members look to for morale and motivation. Discuss with them what is going on and how they can turn things around. Hold a social function in place of a meeting…this will re-energize members. Work with the officers to structure meetings to include a team building activity or mixer for students to be active and involved. Members compete for attention. Find a way to recognize each member for the work they do but focus more on the group process and success.
c. **An individual member's goals differ from those of the organization.**
   i. Have a mission and goal-setting meeting. It is important for the organization and individual member's goals to align for the group to move forward. In this process, the group should change or reaffirm its goals, or students could lose interest and leave.
d. **There exists a lack of trust among members.**
   i. Do an exercise for team-building or trust-building.
   ii. Figure out the root of the problem and work on that.
e. **Programs fail.**
   i. When a group does not work together or know how to do something, failure is right around the corner. If a program fails, reflect with the organization on why it happened and what can be learned for next time.
f. **Program succeeds, but only a few members do the work.**
   i. This is a common situation, and it is not necessarily a problem. Some events/activities only require the support of a few members. Problems arise when the whole organization needs to pull together to produce an event and members do not pull their weight or let the team down.
   ii. Following up with the individuals that did not pull their weight to see what went wrong. During that conversation, and at a general body meeting, highlight the importance of teamwork and being dependable, as well as the negative effects of not being a team player. Understanding consequences is an important step of personal development.
g. **There is a lack of ideas.**
   i. Lack of ideas comes when members are not interested, or they do not feel their ideas are valued. Help them feel valued and interested.
   ii. The brainstorming process is a delicate one. There is no bad idea in the brainstorming process, so treat this process as a safe zone for ideas.

3. **Organizational Problems**
   a. **Meetings are disorganized.**
      i. Assist the leader in creating an agenda and how to delegate tasks effectively during the meeting.
   b. **Meetings are too long.**
      i. See above suggestion.

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c. **The organization suffers from financial problems.**
   i. The type of financial problem the organization is experiencing will determine how you will proceed. If the organization does not have enough money to operate, they can organize a fundraiser, request funds available to student orgs, or implement dues for members. However, if a member of the organization is embezzling funds, the issue is more complicated. Review the organization's constitution and by-laws to check for procedure for removal and financial responsibility of members. If you feel the situation is too big, set a meeting with the office that manages student organizations.

d. **There is no continuity from one year to the next.**
   i. Changing membership is part of the ebb and flow of student organizations, but this does not mean the organization needs to start over each year. Work with the current leaders to recruit and cultivate new members and leaders who will take over the next year and ensure that each officer/leader creates a transition process to pass along to his/her successor. Recommended practices include officer to officer transition, electronic transition, outgoing to incoming executive board transition, and shadowing.

e. **There is a failure to complete the organization's administrative tasks.**
   i. Review duties with each officer so they know what their responsibilities are, and if they do not choose to fulfill those responsibilities, find another member who can.

f. **The organization has no "plan of action."**
   i. It is a good idea to have a goal setting meeting at the beginning of each semester. This gets everyone on the same page. There should also be a few reassessment/evaluation meetings during the semester to modify or create new goals.

4. **Intra-organization Problems**
   a. **Disagreement between an organization and other student organizations.**
      i. Talk with the advisor of that group, or if they do not have an advisor encourage the student leaders of each organization meet to discuss what is happening and act as the moderator. If the problem is not resolved, contact the office that manages student organizations at your institution.
   b. **Disagreement with institutional policies and procedures.**
      i. Set a meeting with the office that manages student organizations at your institution.

5. **Advisor Problems**
   a. **Organization members avoid the advisor.**
      i. Do not take it personally. Find a student or two whom you can connect with and slowly work to integrate yourself into the organization.
   b. **Organization members do not pay attention to the advisor's advice.**
      i. The members will not always listen to the advisor. As long as the decision the students make is not against organizational, institutional or governmental

policies/laws, there is not much you can do. Sometimes students need to learn from their mistakes. If the students are always disregarding your advice, reflect on how you are offering your words. Are you trying to run the organization or are you looking into the best interest of the organization and offering your thoughts at appropriate times?

c. **The advisor is overwhelmed by the responsibility.**
   i. The advisor's job is not to run the organization. Work with the students to balance tasks and responsibilities.

d. **The advisor assumes a leadership function.**
   i. Advisors are a part of a student organization to <u>advise</u>, not to assume leadership functions/positions.

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