"I love, I love, I love my calendar girl yeah-sweet calendar girl." The words made famous in 1961 by singer Neil Sekada as he sang the chart topping hit “Calendar Girl” exempifies the popularity of the iconic calendar. Since then countless women and men have posed in many a themed calendar. When eleven scared but determined women in Yorkshire, England needed to raise money for a noble cause in 1998, they brainstormed how to raise funds through a calendar. The women belonged to a staunch ladies club in Yorkshire known as the Women’s Institute (WI). Although the WI was originally established in 1915 to “revitalize rural communities and to encourage women to become more involved in producing food during the First World War”(Women’s Institute, 2011), a group of women turned this traditional organization on its ear by posing nude in a fundraising calendar.   
  
In February 1998 WI member Annie discovered that her husband John was diagnosed with non- Hodgkin’s Lymphoma. Her good friend and fellow WI member Chris wanted to help. So Chris came up with the idea to create a calendar to raise money for a new couch in the cancer ward of the local hosptial. In the past the WI had produced calendars that were traditional and yielded little profit. However, Chris and Annie gnerated a novel idea to produce a nude calendar knowing that the WI Board of Trustees cherished their good reputation in the community. Having members bearing it all could be perceived as a travesty. So how did Chris convince her fellow WI friends and Board of Trustees to join this cause? How did a group of middle-aged conservative women evolve to Calendar Girls and how could that impact the local WI chapter in the future? This research paper will compare and contrast the Leadership styles, group structure, social interdependence, conflicts, controversies, and collaboration methods of the Women’s Institute versus The Calendar Girls and make recommendations on how WI can thrive with a new cohesive focus going forward.  
  
  
  
  
Leadership: Two Different Recipes

The term leadership is described as “the position or function of a leader; ability to lead; an act or instance of leading; guidance; direction” ( Dictionary.com, 2011). The leadership style of the Women’s Institute (WI) was clearly autocratic with a hierarchical structure. The WI members voted certain members into higher positions. When WI members had ideas or suggestions they had to be submitted to the WI president and Board of Trustees in a public setting. If approved the proposed change would go into effect. The upper levels in the hierarchy solely control the direction, tone, and atmosphere of the WI. In autocratic leadership, decsions are dictated without involving other group members ( Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 183). The WI members rarely or never challenged decisions made by their elected members as the stigma and fear of being labeled as a troublemaker loomed over their heads. Being labeled meant isolation or censure from the WI. Ineed even the seating arrangement at the meetings conveyed a classroom style where the leaders ( teachers) sat in a position of authority in front of all the members. The norms of conversation, adherence to specific rules and regulations, even proper decorum were reinforced by the watchful eye of the WI leadership at the "head of the class."   
  
The leadership style of the Calendar Girls was completely opposite of the WI. The honorary leader Chris Harper and later co-leader Annie were never officially selected. They were politically incorrect Democratic leaders. In the beginning the Calendar Girls members were terrified to approach the WI about a nude calendar. As a natural reaction to the problems described within the local WI chapter, and the resulting ‘boredom’ and lack of free exchange of ideas, Chris and Annie were quickly identified as early leaders of the yet to be formed group The Calendar Girls. Throughout the film, during various times of conflict or disagreement, they demonstrate that “leaders get the best from others by not building fires under people but by building the fire within them” (Kouzes, & Posner, 2007, p.293). In the storming phases the women openly discussed creative ideas. If members disagreed with their honorary leaders they were not ostracized for doing so. In fact, they were encouraged to give constructive criticism and suggestions during brainstorming sessions. In the end The Calendar Girls decided on the direction of the project as a team. By incorporating a democratic leadership style the production of the first calendar and those thereafter have been successful. As of current date the Calendar Girls have raised 1.5 million British pounds for Leukemia Research (Firth, 2011). In United States dollars that is the equivalent to $2,416,655.40 (Ostermiller, 2011).   
  
The Soil of Group Structure

When considering group structure, Johnson and Johnson (2003) observe that, “Two aspects of group interaction are especially important to understanding how a group is structured: differentiated roles and integrating norms.” Differentiated roles in the Knapely WI group (Barton, Mackie & Cole, 2003) are featured as traditional, formal and highly disciplined in its long tenured membership, elected president and single secretary. Members’ roles are to represent the group positively in community events and attend weekly meetings without fail. On the other hand, the calendar sub-group is a reflection of a collaborative, self-initiated co-leadership who have recruited members through shared interest in a high purpose (Barton, Mackie & Cole, 2003). Members embrace their roles as active participants in consensus-building discussions, proud “rogue members” of the larger WI group and demonstrate their commitment by posing for their respective month in the calendar.   
  
The second aspect of group structure, group norms, serves to “integrate the members’ efforts into a unified whole” (Johnson & Johnson, 2003). A fascinating paradox exists in the group norms of the Knapely WI, in that disciplined, long-held norms meant to integrate and unify members’ efforts actually served to stifle member creativity and disillusionment. The movie clearly assigns this fault to the founding bureaucracy of the National Women’s Institute Committee. On the contrary, the Calendar sub-group practices simplistic norms similar to those recommended by William Isaacs (1999), “Listening, Respecting, Suspending and Voicing”. With ease, these friends do their best to honor the best intentions of their group. Given the bonds created by such level of consideration, this group is exceeding successful at “integrating efforts into a unified whole” (Johnson & Johnson, 2003).   
  
“Observers of groups who want to know how a group truly functions look beyond the group’s unique features to its basic structure, a stable pattern of interaction among members” (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). It is interesting to note that the pattern of interaction among members of the Knapely Women’s Institute was stable although not conducive to member engagement. Examples of this arise early in the movie during a montage of Knapely WI weekly meetings demonstrating the routine welcome by the president, a guest presentation to a tepid member-audience and little opportunity for interaction or discussion among members. (Barton, Mackie & Cole, 2003) As a sub-group of members embark on the inspired project to create a fundraising calendar for a local hospital, their group engages in a communication of informal, friendly banter among themselves that moves quickly from one to another, gets to the heart of issues and ends in a lighthearted resolve. The fascinating point of comparison is that the existence of the pattern is not the whole measure of group function. It is also the presence of positive social interdependence within that pattern that brings the interactions to life.   
  
Yarns of Social Interdependence

The juxtaposition of the positive social interdependence of the Calendar Girls with the little to no interdependence of the Knapely WI members is like the bright sunflower that stands apart from the black and white pictures of the calendar. Social interdependence is based on group goals, group purpose, group vision, and mutual problem solving. Positive social interdependence happens when members become aware of the ‘dynamic whole’ of the group and understand that one member’s actions and involvement affects the other members.  
  
It’s clear that the Calendar Girls have reached a sense of the ‘dynamic whole’ when Chris and Annie present the calendar idea at the Knapely WI meeting. When Marie, the WI president, asks if the calendar is another one of Chris’s crazy ideas, Chris responds by saying, “I’m going to make sure this one turns out okay. Because it’s for John. It was inspired by John, and it’s for John. And it’s because of John. And no matter what you might think of the idea, you’re looking at January!” The women involved in the project stand one-by-one and reveal their support of the ‘nude’ calendar. It is at this point that they commit their support of one another, publicly align themselves with Chris and Annie, identify with the higher purpose of the group and exhibit social interdependence, "when individuals share common goals and each individual's outcomes are affected by the actions of the others" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p.91). The growth of the social interdependence of the Calendar Girls leads them to promotive interaction which "occurs as individuals encourage and facilitate each other's efforts to accomplish the group's goals" (Johnson & Johnson, p.92).  
  
In contrast, the Knapely WI chapter shows little to no interdependence. The sense of calling to the group is based on obligation. Like Chris, many women are members because their mother wanted them to be. The Knapely WI does not exhibit promotive interaction in "challenging each other's conclusions and reasoning in order to promote curiosity, motivation to learn, reconceptualization of what one knows, higher-quality decision making, greater insight into the problem being considered" (Johnson and Johnson, 2009, pg.92). When Chris suggests the nude calendar, the disciplined, long-held norms of the Knapely WI breeds a fear that the actions of a few individuals, will obstruct the mission and goals of the group. This fear is obvious when Marie feels obligated to approach the national president about the Calendar Girls project, clearly aligning herself with the formal norms of national WI instead of with the women of her local chapter.  
  
The Calendar Girls are WI members, but function on a voluntary, passion-oriented basis, instead of the membership, obligation-oriented basis of the WI. The Calendar Girls emerge from the close friendship between Chris and Annie and their passion to do something in John’s honor. When the idea starts lacking details and direction, Chris and Annie call in a “facilitator,” Lawrence the photographer. The fellow Calendar Girls' trust in Chris and Annie's judgment leads them to listen to and allow Lawrence's ideas outside the realm of the WI, to come to fruition. His applied insight demonstrated that they were willing to "take the perspectives of others more accurately than individuals engaged in competitive or individualistic efforts" (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p.93). Lawrence provide proceess gain to the group's ideas by bridging the Calendar Girl’s ideas with John’s love of sunflowers and the symbols of the WI’s interests and the group accepts his suggestions.  
  
The social interdependence of the Calendar Girls is like the sunflower in that “every stage of their growth is more beautiful than the last.” They share joys, concerns, ideas, struggles and laughter as they work towards their goals and it is their ability to see each individual as an integral part of the completion of the project that gives shape to their group identity and helps them collaborate well with one another. The WI, like the black and white part of the photo, is stuck following rules and regulations, which does not recognize the uniqueness of their local chapter or the uniqueness of each member, and ultimately stifles the social interdependence and collaboration of the members; thus keeping them from experiencing their ‘dynamic whole.'  
  
  
  
Collaboration: Sowing the Seeds  
The success of the Calendar Team did not come haphazardly, although it may have appeared so at times. Rather, the growth of collaboration within the team fostered the positive interdependence that enabled them to achieve their goals. Ironically the rigid and un-collaborative WI was historically unsuccessful at reaching all but the most basic goals.   
  
Collaboration is defined as consisting of “dynamic, interwoven, and disciplined exchanges of knowledge and information, participative decision making, and co-created solutions to emerging problems” (Beyerlein, Freedman, McGee, & Morgan, 2003, p. 15). While the local WI chapter routinely shared knowledge and information at its meetings, the communication was one-way and the content was seen as irrelevant by most members. Johnson and Johnson (2009) describe one-way communication as “unsatisfactory for the receivers” (p. 157). Participative decision making and co-created solutions, as examined in the leadership and positive interdependence sections, both were highly discouraged by Marie, the local WI president.   
  
The Calendar Group’s collaboration stands in contrast to the lack of collaboration in the local WI chapter – much like the color of the sunflowers stands out on the black and white calendar photos. Members exchange information in truly organic ways: on the hill-top after t’ai-chi, in the middle of a furniture store, on the golf course, in parking lots, and while playing the organ at a wedding. The shared goal of making the calendar a success drives the clear and honest communication. Or as Johnson and Johnson explain, “group goals breathe life into group members’ hopes and dreams and enable them to see the exciting possibilities of their joint efforts” (2009, p. 71). This as-needed, word of mouth communication was much more effective than many communication plans. It enabled the group to make required decisions.   
  
Throughout the project many decisions, large and small, needed to be made. At first, Annie and Chris made most decisions together; however the group quite naturally knew when decisions required more input. They maintained flexibility when matching “decision-making procedures with the needs of the situation” (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, p. 556), such as when deciding how to set up the photographs so as to preserve modesty and who would pose for which month.   
  
The Calendar Team also showed an aptitude for co-created solutions to emerging problems. When the local WI initially challenged the idea, the members stood together as a group, exemplifying their cohesivieness and determination to make the calendar a success. As Kouzes and Posner explain, "to get extraordinary things done, people have to rely on each other" (2007, p. 233); all the members had the courage to unite in face of disapproval. They also creatively worked together to find a sponsor and then promote the calendar. Their collaboration was perhaps most glorious during the photo shoot when members encouraged one another through the apprehension of their individual poses and spurred each other to the creativity and purpose of the cause.   
  
The Calendar Team clearly exhibited collaboration that enabled them to reach their goals; however as we will examine in the next section the group was not without conflict.  
  
Mixing and Managing the Ingredients of Conflict

“Not everything that is faced can be changed but nothing can be changed until it is faced” – James Baldwin (Johnson, & Johnson, 2009, p.377).  
  
Johnson & Johnson (2009) define controversy as "the conflict that arises when one person's ideas, information, conclusions, theories, and opinions are incompatible with those of another person, and the two seek to reach an agreement" (p.323-324). The contrast between the WI group and Calendar Girls group in regards to how conflicts and controversy were managed (and encouraged or discouraged) was evident throughout the film. Within this film, we see conflict at all hierarchies and complexities. Frakes (n.d.), posits that the level or stages of conflict are: “organizational, cultural, departmental (team), level, and individual.” Barriers, both internal and external presented themselves in various forms, but what differed significantly between the groups’ behavior was how those barriers were overcome in the interest of progress. Positive interdependence was achieved within the Calendar Girls group, while the WI group simply existed. So what factors and influences led to this stark difference and what can we learn from it?  
  
Early in the film we see evidence of an existence or development of a sub-group, when Chris asks a fellow WI member at the tent festival, “Whose side are you on, Brutus?” (Firth, 2003). It is clear that some members of the WI already identified “outside” of the group. There is no emphasis on collaboration and members appear to be apathetic, resulting in a kind of absent cooperativism that doesn't challenge the status quo. "Too much conflict can immobilize an organization by channelling the efforts of its members into unproductive activities, but too little conflict may encourage complacency and lethargy" (Morgan, 2006, p. 199). Constructive conflict was not encouraged, leading to a lack of innovation and creativity within the local WI chapter. The new idea for the next calendar was simply "told" to the group in a meeting by the local chapter leader, and met with more apathy and boredom. "Since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinion that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied" - John Stewart (Johnson, & Johnson, 2009, p.323). There was little structured controversy within the WI organization and local chapter. "If a group is to make effective decisions and solve problems competently, controversies should not only be encouraged and sought out, but deliberately structured" (Johnson, & Johnson, 2009, p.327). We clearly witness a culture within the WI organization and local WI chapter of exclusion in regards to decision making, and a focus on individual, autocratic power. Marie attempted to direct conflict in a competitive way with the two Calendar Girl leaders Annie and Chris, at home and in a WI meeting, without long-term success. For the rest of the WI chapter members, it was understood that conflict is to be avoided and discouraged, therefore the much needed controversy is suppressed.  
  
Within the Calendar Girls group we see evidence that supports Johnson & Johnson's claim that "disagreements and arguments among individuals with diverse information and ideas are all important aspects of gaining creative insight" (2009, p.340). Both Annie and Chris mobilize the resistant members of the WI chapter, convincing and negotiating their buy-in, and ultimate membership into the group. We see evidence of integrative negotiating as Chris and Annie each appeal to specific reluctant women to sign on to the controversial project of the nude calendar. "Compared with concurrence seeking, debate, and individualistic efforts, controversy typically produces group productivity, individual achievement and quality of decision making" (Johnson, & Johnson, p.339). By introducing the idea of the nude calendar, a necessary controversy was introduced that slowly, but surely led to positive interdependence. The controversy united the group, empowered the individuals, and aided them in making effective decisions such as photographer selection and prospective months for each woman.  
  
  
Consensus building is a key aspect of constructive conflict resolutuion. When Chris delivered an impassioned speech in front of the entire WI conference and influences the assembly about the purpose of the WI, she began to turn the tide of public opinion and successfully navigated a potential roadblock to success for the Calendar Girls group. She handily negotiates a distributive issue, “where one member benefits only if the other member agrees to make a concession” (Johnson, & Johnson, 2009, p.378). This is the “tipping point” of the film, allowing the calendar project to proceed, but not the end of conflict. The ongoing partnership/friendship between Chris and Annie unveils tensions and conflict as the group heads to Hollywood to promote the calendar. Throughout the remainder of the film we witness Chris and Annie working out a conflict through a variety of approaches. There is, at times, some avoidance of conflict as each psychologically wrestles with the appropriate ways to address concerns. We ultimately witness the type of conflict management strategy that is indicative of the lifelong close relationship the two women share - one of dual concern, or "concern for self and concern for other" (Johnson, & Johnson, p.374). Interestingly, the two women utilized the five basic strategies of the turtle (withdrawing), the owl (confronting with an emphasis on problem solving), the shark (forcing), the fox (compromising), and the teddy bear (smoothing) as they work out the tensions that have arisen from increased media scrutiny and their newly found, sometimes unwanted, "star" status (Johnson, & Johnson, p.374). The primary decisions they made however, are reflective of the problem solving owl conflict strategy, whereby they chose to listen and provide candid feedback towards their shared vision.  
  
  
  
Final Recipe and Future State

The paradox of leadership and influence is that in order to gain it, you have to give it away (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). When WI chapter President Marie ceded power to the Calendar Girls team to pursue their unique method of fundraising, record sales resulted that benefitted the organization and the community. The process gain of uniting the efforts of the group and sub group became much more than the sum of its parts.  
  
Although the calendar project was very successful, it would be a stretch to utilize its momentum to convince the Knapley WI leadership to change their hierarchical vision to a shared, strategic one overnight. However, following President Marie’s television statement after that thrill of the calendar sales that the WI sought to “empower women,” the organization may be ready for a change. By building upon her proclamation and publicly recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of the WI’s leaders, the powers that be may be primed to revisit the steps that got them there with the Calendar Girls. Since effective, sustainable change requires people to “collectively explore each other’s assumptions, seek and expand common ground, share a desired future, and jointly take ownership of the solutions to the issues at hand…” (Holman, Devane & Cady 2008, p.3), it may take the mix and selection of several OD initiatives to bring the two groups in better focus. Both small and large, short-term and long-term OD interventions might be needed to create a new pattern of collaboration, positive social interdependence and distributed leadership for the Knapley chapter.  
  
Capitalizing on the “high” of the blockbuster calendar project, a quick hit intervention could be a Technology of Participation (ToP) method using ORID (Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional) questioning (Oyler & Harper, 2007, p. 151) about the calendar project and how it relates to the WI’s mission in the future. “Any change initiative necessarily begins with a group of people who grasp the need for change. The focus on voice, cohesion, and action represents an ecumenical approach to change theory and practice: inclusive rather than exclusive; collective rather than directive; effective rather than resistant" (Axelrod, Axelrod, Jacobs, & Beedon, 2006, p.4). The ORID session(s) would be deemed successful if two-way feedback was provided amongst membership and leaders, and if set action plans were established and measured. (See Table 1 for more evidence of interventions and measurement).  
  
Expanding upon the ORID sessions, Dialogue and Deliberation, (D & D) can be used to collectively learn from the perspectives and experience of all parties, not just on the calendar team’s project, but of the WI chapter's experiences throughout the past year. Critical to D & D is the establishment of communication ground rules and storytelling to foster a range of views. This process could “…build and strengthen relationships, bridge gaps, resolve conflicts, generate innovative solutions to problems, inspire collaborative action, and more…” (Heirbarcher, 2007, p. 103). Evidence of an effective D& D initiative in this situation might include additional round table discussions and the establishment of new communication norms and processes.  
  
Sometimes it is hard to focus the lens of the camera on ourselves and our own flaws, (as the Calendar Girls discovered, especially in the nude!) Therefore, rather than looking in the mirror, it may prove an easier first step for the WI leadership to "delegate" the creation of educational sessions to an internal project team. This could plant the seeds for a mini Rapid Results initiative which could build on the “let’s try it” approach (Murphy, Kirwan, & Ashkenas, 2007, p. 686) for more engaging and relevant meetings. A quick, fun session could be a Jazz or Drum Café session which would enable WI members to incorporate the existing music in their meetings to a new paradigm shift of appreciating collaboration and social interdependence. Program evaluations and proactive surveys through the project team could provide immediate feedback on the relevance of the content and other criteria.  
  
Once WI Leaders and members get accustomed to asking each other for authentic feedback, there are many methods for the organization to capitalize on to assist in the development of a truly committed, cooperative group. Leveraging the use of surveys after educational programs, additional surveys could evolve to soliciting feedback on both the content and congruence of programs and other outcomes (Hale, 2007), to the means by which chapter results are achieved such as Johnson and Johnson’s Level of Acceptance/Trust Questionnaires, (2009, p.117,118).  
  
Ultimately, the success of the WI chapter will depend upon the alignment of the members passion, commitment and talents to the shared mission of the group (Johnson and Johonson, 2009; Kouzes and Posner, 2007). Utilizing Appreciative Inquiry questions about the vision and goals for the organization such as, “What is our local chapter like when we are at our best?” and “What are we most passionate about?” will help define an energizing, meaningful purpose for its members. Through the implementation of a strategic planning session such as a Strategic Visioning, the WI could integrate the stellar history of the organization with the innovative calendar project success towards an integrated, motivating vision and mission. The Knapley WI's organizational camera lens could evolve from an autocratic, black or white perspective to that of complementary, diversified colors, creating unique and captivating results.  
  
  
**Table 1 – WI Chapter/Calendar Girls Proposed Interventions**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Presenting Problem** | **Proposed Intervention** | **People Involved** | **Measure Success** |
| Boring meetings/ Lack of positive interdependence | Short term- Jazz session or Drum Café-  Better meeting management/ structure  Long-term- consensus building educational Rapid Response Project Team  Organic surveys on educational sessions content and process | Calendar girls propose idea & find facilitator  Visual recording of key points/ Chevron/U shape seating  Committee of Select Members of WI leadership & Membership  Sub-committee of educational team | Feedback from program feedback/surveys  " "  (Kilpatrick Level 1 & 2 evaluations) Quarterly feedback to WI board on process, # of attendees per session  Provide annual feedback to on other organizations, WI chapters and national’s educational programs |
| Autocratic, hierarchical leadership | Short-term ToP - (using ORID)  Appreciative Inquiry  Long-term- Dialogue and Deliberation | Calendar girls, WI leadership  “ “  Whole WI chapter membership | Documenting best practices???  Set the stage for new strategic/goal planning session  Communication norms & processes, continued dialogue, # of people speaking in meetings |
| Avoidance of conflict & group structure | Short-term Appreciative Inquiry  Leadership Development | Calendar girl leaders with WI leadership, off site  WI Leadership in conjunction with other chapters | Establish new norms to give and receive feedback  Changed behavior on two-way communication in meetings & 1 to 1. # of ideas implemented outside of WI leadership. |
| Incongruent mission and purpose | Long-term- Search Conference Or Strategic Visioning | WI & Calendar Girls Leadership | Redefine process to align strategic focus and objectives Identify new mission and shared vision,  Action plan with new, qualitiative and quantitative, objectives |

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