



TB 012 - Understanding the Patrol System

"The Patrol system is the one essential feature in which Scout training differs from that of all other organisations."

"The object of the Patrol system is mainly to give real responsibilities to as many of the boys as possible, with a view to develop their character."

(Baden-Powell, Aids to Scoutmastership)

These two quotes of the Founder illustrate the importance he attached to the patrol or team system. This system is the basis on which Scouts units in all age ranges must be organised - from Cub Scouts (children) to Rovers (young adults). Unfortunately, it is sometimes misunderstood and misused. All too often, it is simply a system of "small group operation", while it is primarily intended as a system in which young people participate in decision-making, and as a tool for citizenship education.

The aim of this factsheet is to help Scout leaders to gain a better understanding of the elements of the team system, its role in Scouting's educational system and how to make it work.

The elements of the team system

The team system does not just involve the teams. It involves all the institutions that organise relationships, communication, decision-making and evaluation processes within the group composed of young people and adult leaders.

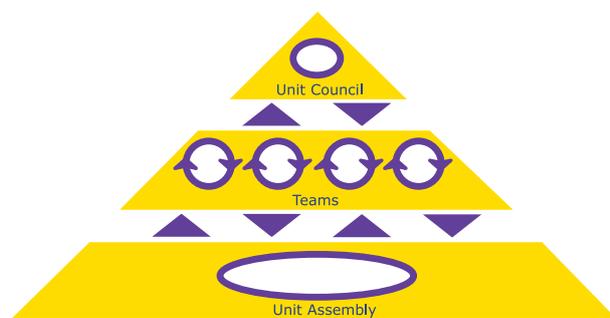


Diagram 1

As we can see in diagram 1, there are three main institutions in the Scout unit:

- The Team (Patrol)
- The Unit Council
- The Unit Assembly

The team: a primary group

The American sociologist Charles Horton Cooley defines family and childhood playgroups as primary groups. A primary group is characterised by close interpersonal relationships. It involves a strong sense of loyalty between the members, a shared sense of belonging, based on mutual caring and identification. These groups are called primary groups because they shape an individual's moral ideals. They are the root reference of the moral - and thus social - life of an adult.

A primary group has the following characteristics: a limited number of members (5-8) which enable each person to have a clear perception of the other members; relationships based on affinity become established between the members (what they like, dislike, feel indifferent towards); the division of labour within the group and the frequency of meetings result from the adhesion of group members to common goals. The group develops a micro-culture with its own values, norms, language and traditions.

The team: a natural grouping

The Six, the Patrol, the Team are primary groups. They are typically the kind of groups that children and especially adolescents seek spontaneously. One of Scouting's major strengths is to have recognised this tendency and to use the ways in which children and adolescents spontaneously organise themselves. Our Founder firmly believed this:

"Scouting puts the boys into fraternity gangs which is their natural organisation whether for games, mischief, or loafing"

(Baden-Powell, Aids to Scoutmastership)

This is why the key to success in a Scout unit is when young people form teams according to the criteria that naturally bring young people together: spontaneous affinities and friendships, the fact of living in the same neighbourhood, going to the same school, etc.

The team must first of all be formed of young people who have chosen to be with each other.

The team: an efficient tool for communication and action

Just before and after the last World War, American sociologists brought to light the importance of the primary group.

- Observation studies of small groups of 5-6 female workers, conducted over several years, revealed that their output continued to increase despite increases or decreases in pay. It was discovered that the most important factor in increased output was the fact that the women had spontaneously developed friendships and thus took pleasure in their work. (Elton Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization*, 1933).
- Researchers also discovered the importance of primary groups through studies conducted during the War: essentially, a soldier fights to defend his friends or to conform to the expectations of a small group of friends - and much less out of hatred of the enemy or because of ideological convictions.
- While studying the US presidential election in 1940, other researchers were surprised to discover that the press and radio had little effect on votes. The most important factor in deciding votes was the interpersonal influence within primary groups - the daily exchanges between associates and friends.
- Numerous research studies conducted since have corroborated these observations. In business or in the public sector, research has shown that attempts at communication via hierarchical means are inefficient if they are not also relayed by primary groups.

The small group of 5-8 people is the most efficient form of organisation in terms of communication, action and the transmission of values.

The team: a peer group

A peer group is a group in which all the members are equal and have the same status. In a Scout unit, all the young people are equal, but perform different roles according to the needs of group life. The team leader is elected by his/her peers - in agreement with the adult leaders. He or she has a certain amount of authority, but it is in the service of the group - he or she is not a dictator. The team leader helps the team members to express themselves, to evaluate group life, to make decisions and to organise themselves. He or she is the "voice" concerning the decisions taken: the team leader represents the team at the Unit Council meeting. One should not overestimate the importance of the team leader.

Other roles are just as important: the Secretary in charge of keeping the team's records and the conclusions of the team meetings; the Treasurer, in charge of the team's financial resources and accounts; the Equipment Manager, the Cook; the First Aider; the Journalist, etc. Each role is equally important in the success of the team.

In Tool box 015 "How to analyse interpersonal relationships in the unit" we can discover more about the importance of cooperation in a peer group: young people who are lucky enough to develop relationships within a peer group find it easier to develop efficient social relationships: they develop appropriate strategies so as to become integrated into the group; they acquire better social skills faster.

A Scout unit is usually composed of 4 teams of 6-8 members each.

The Scout unit: a secondary group

A secondary group brings together a fairly large number of people in order to perform differentiated tasks. It oversees the relationships between people and vis-à-vis the institution according to its structures and pre-established rules.

The unit is a secondary group. It has to manage the interaction and cooperation between the primary groups (the teams). The role of the adult leaders is to orientate and facilitate the functioning of the unit.

When adults first start leading a group of young people, the majority hesitate between three fundamental attitudes:

- An autocratic attitude: I decide everything that needs to be done and impose my decisions on the young people. This kind of attitude is generally adopted in the name of efficiency ("we're not going to waste our time talking, I know what we need to do", in the name of security ("we must not take any risks") or in the name of morality ("there are certain things that are not open to discussion, they are rules to obey").
- An anarchic or laissez-faire attitude: I mustn't impose any rules whatsoever, nor any particular way of doing things. The young people must decide everything by themselves. This kind of attitude may be inspired by ideology ("one must not forbid nor impose anything") or simply because leaders refuse to accept the responsibility or do not feel able to assume it.
- A democratic attitude: this involves providing direction on procedures and a framework for decision-making, but not on the content of the decisions. This is the attitude which the Scout Method advocates. In other words, the Scout

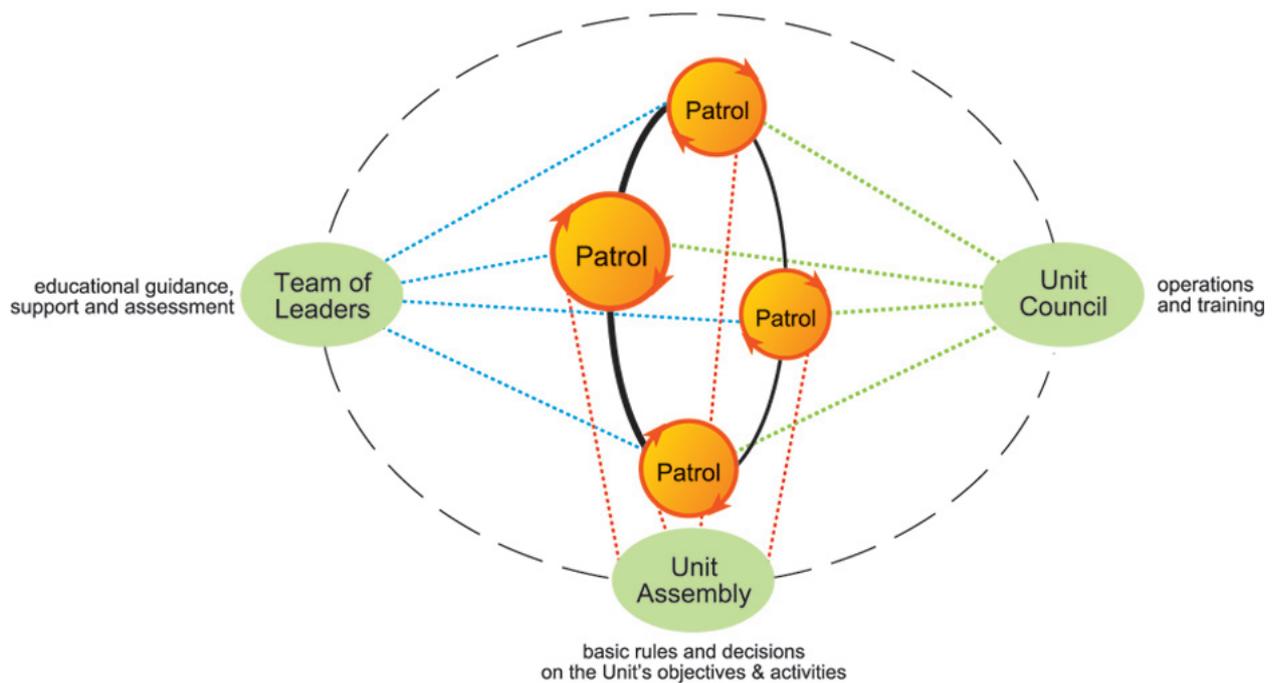


Diagram 2

(extract from *The International Handbook for the Leaders of the Scout Section*, edited by the Interamerican Scout Office)

leader establishes the team system in the unit. That is not an option. It is the framework needed for group life. Nonetheless, through this system, the young people are able to take part in making decisions concerning the “content” of group life, e.g. choosing activities, evaluating them and deciding on their set of rules in accordance with the Scout Law.

In 1939, the psychologist Kurt Lewin conducted an experiment to demonstrate how democratic behaviour was superior autocratic or laissez-faire behaviour, both in terms of efficiency as well as the pleasure derived by the participants.

If the adult leaders are to maintain a democratic attitude, true institutions need to be in place. Once this is achieved, the leaders’ attitude is no longer a subjective matter, it is determined by the need to respect the democratic framework of the institution. The two “institutions” that permit the democratic organisation of interaction and cooperation between the teams are the Unit Council and the Unit Assembly (Fig. 2). The fundamental law that serves as a reference in evaluating and organising group life is the Scout Law.

The unit assembly: the legislative body

The unit assembly is the “Parliament” of this small republic of young people (the Scout unit). It has legislative powers. It periodically convenes all of the young people to evaluate group life and the group’s progress, to decide on objectives and the rules of group life and uses the Scout Law as a reference.

During unit assembly meetings, each Scout speaks for him/herself and not as a team representative. A young person, elected at the beginning of the session, chairs the unit assembly.

The role of the unit assembly is to make the main decisions concerning group life:

- To determine the Unit’s objectives for the year
- To decide on the activities to be carried out during the Programme cycle (see TB005 “How to manage a Programme cycle”)
- To evaluate life in the Unit and group progression
- To adopt common rules in answer to identified problems.

The unit council: the executive body

The unit council is the executive body. It is the government of the unit. Sometimes called the “Patrol Leaders’ Council”, this body involves the team leaders and the adult leaders. Many people wrongly think that the function of the adult leaders is to run the unit. This power belongs to the unit council. In practice, this means that the unit leaders must not make any important decisions outside of the unit council.

The unit council meets at least once a month. It is responsible for taking all the decisions concerning the organisation of activities and group life. It establishes the dates of activities and coordinates the missions of each team within

the framework of the common activities. Through their representative in the unit council (the team leaders), all of the patrols are involved in the decision-making process. Each patrol is given advance notice of the council's agenda and can discuss the various subjects in order to provide their representative with a clear mandate.

A system of youth participation

"The Patrol system has a great character-training value if it is used aright. It leads each boy to see that he has some individual responsibility for the good of his Patrol. It leads each Patrol to see that it has definite responsibility for the good of the Troop... Through it the Scouts themselves gradually learn that they have considerable say in what their Troop does. It is the Patrol system that makes the Troop, and all Scouting for that matter, a real co-operative effort."

(Baden-Powell, Aids to Scoutmastership)

This quote of the Founder illustrates the primary aim of the team system: it enables young people to really participate in decision-making. In a recent Internet Forum on youth participation, the team system was identified as the primary tool for youth participation in Scouting. One of the participants neatly summarized the main conclusion of this forum as follows:

"Scouting is a youth movement, supported by adults; it is not just a youth movement organised by adults. In effect, Scouting offers a "learning" community of young people and adults committed to a partnership of enthusiasm and experience..."

How this can be put into practice in the different age groups

As diagram 2 shows, the principal role of the adult leaders is to advise, propose and reassure. They need to offer a space for experience which enables each person to develop new attitudes, skills and knowledge so as to achieve the personal development objectives offered by the framework of Scouting's educational goals. They also need to be attentive to the physical, emotional and moral security of the young people. The team system enables them to do so. This applies to each age group, although how it is achieved will evidently depend on the capacities of the age group. As diagram 3 shows, the extent of adult involvement is greater in the younger age ranges. The degree of youth participation in

decision-making increases with age. However, from the earliest age, children have a say and take an active part in decision-making.

A tool for citizenship education

Playing an active role in Scouting prepares young people for responsibility in society. Young people who have learned how to manage a project together in a Scout unit are better prepared to assume their responsibilities as citizens when they become adults. The team system is not just a way of organising the group - it is also a key tool for citizenship education.

During the same Forum on youth participation, one of the participants summarized how the team system achieves this aim:

"In a sense, we offer a simulation or a microcosm of life in larger communities or societies and of what is meant by being an active and responsible citizen. If only the world resembled the microcosm of a World Scout Jamboree! The patrol system is about learning to live together in harmony and achieving more than one could by oneself through synergy. It is about achieving common goals for the benefit of everyone."

The team system enables young people to experience the fact that, together in small communities within a larger communication and decision-making system, they can plan and achieve projects, and organise group life according to common values. In other words, we no longer have to accept events passively. We can change ourselves and the world - and thus build a better future together.

Nothing is more urgent nor more important than offering young people this experience.

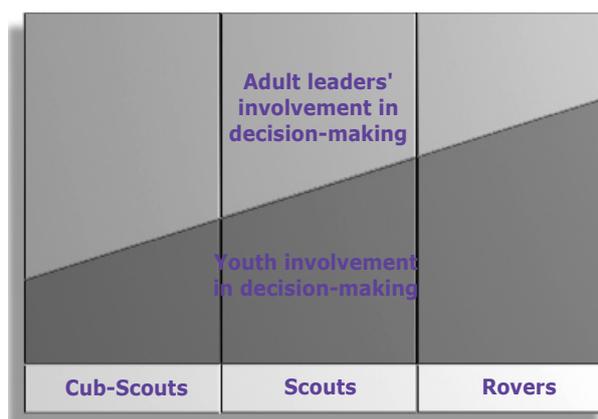


Diagram 3



World Organization of the Scout Movement
Organisation Mondiale du Mouvement Scout

Produced by the Education & Development Department, World Scout Bureau
Box 241, 1211 Geneva 4, Switzerland. Telephone (+41 22) 705 1010 Telefax (+41 22) 705 1020
worldbureau@world.scout.org