Despite reputation, committees will stay

If you're over the age of 15, you probably belong to a committee. More likely, you serve on several. And you'd rather you didn't.

Committees have a terrible reputation for wasting time and accomplishing little, concedes Prof. John E. Tropman of the University of Michigan School of Social Work. Whether formed within Congress or the neighborhood garden club, they are often hampered by weak management, poor attendance and obscure goals.

Why, then, do people keep creating and joining them?

"It's in the American character," Tropman believes. "We insist on participatory democracy rather than vesting all authority in one person.

"Also, while the voting system allows us to express feelings for or against an issue, the committee provides an outlet for those of us who feel intensely about that issue or who have a special interest to protect.

"Finally, society has become so complex that relying on one decision-maker is impractical. The people with information are frequently different from the people in power. It is necessary to establish a vehicle in which both can work toward a single goal."

Committees are here to stay, Tropman asserts, no matter how poor their image or their track record. Thus he has compiled "The Essentials of Committee Management," co-authored by Elmer J. Tropman and U-M social work Prof. Harold R. Johnson. It will be released early in 1978 by Nelson Hall Publishing House of Illinois.

The book covers all facets of committee functioning, from the organizational stages through policy implementation. The roles of the chairpersons, officers, members and staff are outlined, as are the mechanics of preparing meeting space, assembling working materials and insuring a high attendance.

"The main reason many committes work poorly," Tropman believes, "is that the participants simply don't know what to do. The fault usually lies with an inept chairperson, for heading a committee requires an energetic combination of administrative skills, commitment, initiative and impartiality."

On the other hand, he says, even the most capable chairperson can be saddled with a vague directive, such as "improve working conditions," or with a passive, unreliable membership. The new book presents some guidelines for eliminating the most common problems or preventing them from developing in the first place.

"Committees have become so commonplace that they are sometimes regarded as a trivial, almost comical aspect of our society. Yet as society grows more complicated, more and more coalitions are being formed to meet personal and institutional goals.

Economists forecast

In 1978 Michigan is expected to record a third consecutive year of growth in personal income, along with a slight rise in employment, substantial state revenue increases, and a virtually unchanged rate of inflation, University of Michigan economists predict.

Profs. Saul H. Hymans and Harold T. Shapiro presented details of their Michigan forecast at the university's 25th annual conference on the economic outlook.

Their control forecast, which assumes a turn toward more expansive national monetary policy by mid-1978, no major changes in federal tax policy, and the passage of an energy bill which allows domestic crude oil prices to reach the world market price by 1980, foresees "a modest but clearly evident slowdown in the state economy which begins to take hold about a year from now" barring national policy actions to cut personal income taxes and increase the investment tax credit.

The Michigan forecast is compiled by the U-M Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics, and suggests a rise in state personal income of 11.2 per cent, two percentage points above the Hymans-Shapiro forecast for U.S. personal income and only about one percentage point below the increase estimated for 1977.

The U-M economists said total state employment will continue upward through mid-1979. Increase in non-manufacturing employment "probably represents a healthy redistribution of employment in the state," said the economists.

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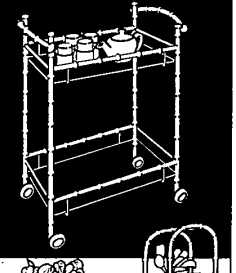

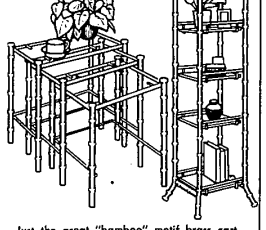

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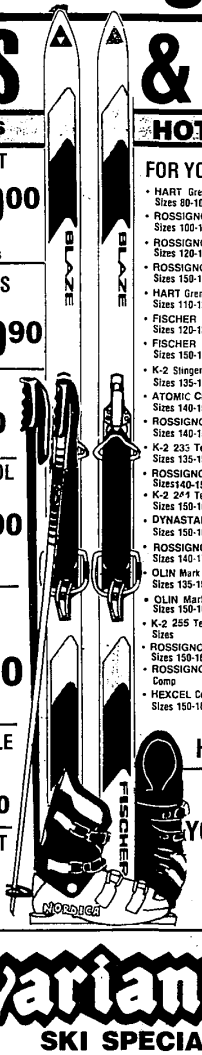

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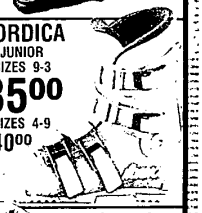

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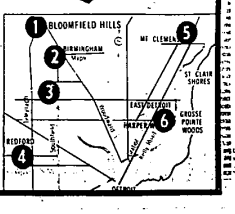

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