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# **Group Dynamics**

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# Group Dynamics

## Objectives:

- Define Group Dynamics
- Why look at Group Dynamics?
- Stages of Group Development
- Criteria for Group Growth
- Group Forces

## Define Group Dynamics

The term *group dynamics* usually refers to the study of individuals interacting in small groups, and this thumbnail definition gives rise to a number of questions related to groups. What is a group? Is the concept *group* needed? If groups exist, how do they function? Are there principles or laws governing group behavior?

As a point of reference, I would like to suggest that a group is a living system, self-regulating through shared perception, interaction, sensing, feedback, and through interchange with its environment. Each group has unique wholeness qualities that become patterned, by way of members' thinking, feeling, and communicating, into structured subsystems. The group finds some way to maintain balance while moving through progressive changes, creating its own guidelines and rules and seeking its own goals through recurring cycles of interdependent behavior.

**Exercise:** *From the group note all the various groups we can think of from any sector of life.*

*Some examples could be:*

- The family*
- A mob*
- Volunteers*
- Prisoners*
- A study group*
- Work Groups*
- Project team*
- Sports group*
- Sports team*
- Military groups*
- Terrorist*
- Church groups*
- School groups*
- Leadership groups*
- Management groups, etc.*

We are all familiar with another usage for “group” that will not fall into the examples above or the ones you provided. We might classify all the drivers on the highway that drink and drive and call them a group. Or we may define a group of people who lack motivation, or designate a group of people who succeed. In all these cases, the groups of individuals are not interacting together, but separately as

individuals, and are being used for statistical or comparative purposes. The use of groups in this fashion does not meet our definition. By looking at the “dynamics” we will quickly see how our focus is better defined.

The second word in our phrase is *dynamics*, which implies forces that are complex and interdependent in a common reference or setting; but again, there is, as yet, no precise definition. In this session we will refer to “group dynamics” only in general terms. (Refer to the table on page 8 to view a list of leading contributors in the field of Organizational Behavior. This will aid each student to better see the scope of the subject at hand.)

### **Why look at Group Dynamics?**

Understand that much of our lives are spent with one group or another. Therefore, a better comprehension could make our time more productive and fulfilling. If we make an assessment of our time, our contributions, our productivity, and the usefulness of our interactions or return on our investment, we will be more demanding of all group activities. If you have goals for your life, the only way you will ever see them become a reality is to stay focused and guard your time and energy closely. The last thing any of us needs is someone else achieving their goals at our expense! “Know thyself!”

### **Stages of group development**

The life of a group passes through a number of stages of development. Initially, the members may be strangers or only slightly acquainted. Communication may be difficult; the members may be somewhat uncomfortable with one another. Investigators have noted certain regularities, as well as puzzling and paradoxical development, in the growth and maturing of groups.

You are part of a newly formed group and today is the first day everyone in the group has been together. Today is the birth of a new group. At this moment, on the first day, you are confronted with new names and faces, new demands, and the group as a whole is at its least effective with interpersonal relationships.

### ***Exercise:***

*How many in the group knows everyone else?*

*How many in the group have never met everyone else in the group before now?*

*How many in the group are sitting in a subgroup of those you know?*

*Take 30 seconds to introduce and meet those around you.*

*Everyone is require to move and relocate yourself around people you don't know. Do this now!*

*Take 30 seconds to introduce and meet those around you.*

*The truth is, all of us are comfortable around people we know, and we tend to gravitate toward comfort.*

*The only difference between people we know and strangers are time and interaction. I can assure you that by the end of the week the interpersonal and interaction level will be significantly greater than on the first day of College.*

In one or more of the stages of the life of a group, there will be periods of excitement. During such a time communication will flow easily, interaction will heighten, group progress, contributions and productivity will surge. At the group and individual level satisfaction is the hallmark for such moments. These periods will strengthen and aid in the bonding of the group as it sees achievement.

There are many studies and opinions regarding the various stages of development of groups. For this session, however, we will look at only one such opinion. The following study was performed by Mann in 1975; it offered a five-stage model of group development:

- 1) Dependency upon leader or trainer; here we see the interpersonal relationship not yet formed; the group is disjointed; only a collective group of individuals; structure is rudimentary.
- 2) Initial anxiety or resistance; not yet focused on goals and duty; social challenges and barriers still a hindrance; structure is forming.
- 3) Increase in frustration and hostility; sub-groups form, many barriers eliminated; structure is predictable.
- 4) Intimacy, integration, and mutual syntheses in the work phase; the formation a solid group now exists and social, interpersonal relationships are not the focus and concern; structure is not a concern, as it has an accepted existence.
- 5) A separation and anxiety phase; the feeling of loss exists due to the bonds forged and accomplishments made; the death of the group.

Researchers tend to ignore group structure in their studies or take it for granted, while in the real world structure is the essence or result of the development stages. In groups, the progress will depend on structure, and as the group moves through stages of development, its structure changes. Structure grows out of a need for effective and progressive work. It is necessary to take into account the motivation of participants and their skills and resources, as well as the surrounding physical and social environment, to determine the progression rate and achievement level. (See more about structure in “Group Forces”.)

### ***Exercise:***

*When my son was 14 he was a Junior Scholar, and for this achievement had a choice of several summer activities. He chose to attend Coastal Carolina University to study marine biology and take scuba diving. On his first day at school, he was not sure he wanted to stay. He did not know the first person. He made several calls home in the first week and no calls during the second week. When we picked him up weeks later he wanted to show us the campus and meet all his classmates, and talked for three hours non stop until we arrived home where he fell asleep and slept until the next morning. What were the dynamics of this event?*

*This past Memorial Day there was a CAP Reunion at Wing Headquarters in Columbia. The reunion was for a group of cadets from the late sixties to the early seventies. This was the second such reunion for the same group. Why would this group go to such effort to get back together some thirty-odd years later?*

### **Each group is Unique**

How much time is spent in each stage of development varies greatly. Some groups move relatively swiftly through the early stages, only to level off at a more advanced stage. Some groups regress or fall back frequently to earlier stages. Serious difficulties in establishing goals will also prevent progress. The composition of group membership may affect development, particularly if certain member skills, knowledge, or other resources are limited. However, the temptation to pin the blame for group failures on individual group members should be resisted. Look for causes of slow progress or reasons for group

inefficiency at the group level, not at the level of individual personalities. The most practical approach to the diagnosis of problems relies on an understanding of the group's processes in general and on its stages of development in particular.

### **Criteria for Group Growth**

- *Adaptation:* “An increase in openness, that is, an increase in the range, diversity, and effectiveness of (a group's) channels of intake of information from the world outside” (Deutsch, 1973, as quoted by Mills, p. 21). Capacity to extend the scope of the group's contracts and obligations beyond current boundaries. Capacity to alter the group's customs, rules, techniques, and so on to accommodate new information and new contracts.
- *Goal attainment:* Capacity to hold goal-seeking efforts in abeyance while alternative goals are being considered. Capacity to shift to, or add, new goals.
- *Integration:* Capacity to differentiate into sub-parts while maintaining collective unity. Capacity to export resources without becoming impoverished and to send emissaries without losing their loyalty.

- *Pattern maintenance and extension:* Capacity to receive new members and to transmit to them the group's culture and capabilities. Capacity to formulate in permanent form the group's experience and learning and to convey them to other groups and to all of the groups descendants.

## **Group Forces**

### **Interconnection**

One of the most important assumptions underlying contemporary group psychology states that all of the various aspects of group behavior are interconnected. This is important when you consider it necessary to achieve a goal or complete a project. The reading of the group behavior can therefore be an important source of intelligence, and aid in evaluation of the group potential or clues in how to get the group as a whole back on track.

### **Process and Content**

The process of any group is the dealing with rules or procedures, and the content is referred to as the 'subject matter at hand'. The group will concern itself with content, that is, the literal task at hand or the subject matter until the presence of conflict. If the group were to bog down in fruitless squabbles over the task at hand, it is the process that will gain calm and control. Many processes may be in motion at the same time and may be on numerous levels: group level as a whole, in sub-groups, and in individuals. Process is not always official or recognized, and therefore proceeds in opposition to the stated direction of the group.

### **Structure**

The structure of a group refers to the arrangement of its parts and how those parts relate to one another and to the group as a whole. The parts consist of persons, units, roles or positions, and offices. Status (value, prestige, power) and hierarchy of group subunits are aspects of structure, and these may be established formally and informally. Group norms, rules, and procedures give some degree of order and predictability to the functioning of the parts of a group. They consist of guidelines to behavior, that is, value judgements about what should and should not be done and how to maintain social relations. The ability of a group to make norms and rules appropriate to its own needs and purposes is important for group effectiveness and the well-being of members.

### **Personalities**

The effectiveness of a group depends on matching the type of group structure with the particular qualities of members' personalities. Individuals searching for safety or security are likely to feel better in a more authoritarian group, and their performance seems to improve. The person for whom self-esteem is important, however, seems to prefer groups in which the structure and leadership are more egalitarian.

### **Environment**

There is a universal tendency to bring into a group ground rules, guidelines, roles, and status from outside the group. The physical and social environment can have a powerful influence on a group. Consider setting as diverse as a factory, a hospital, a school, an army base, a corporate penthouse, a slum. Through the social surroundings, the group obtains emotional and cognitive resources, or supplies and energy. Consider: the human environment is itself organized according to its own structure, norms, and values. The real challenge to a collection of people who have a job to do or needs to be met is to develop custom-made structure. Like a good suit of cloths, the custom-made structure fits only one group. The structure will enable the group to function well, to achieve its purpose, and to derive satisfaction from its efforts.

## **Cohesiveness**

Some characteristics associated with cohesiveness are: members are motivated to work toward the group's objectives; the group is well-organized or becomes well-organized; members are attracted to members; the group achieves its goals.

Where cohesiveness is high, you will find a group effective in most all its undertakings. Where cohesiveness is low, you will find anxiety is high and effectiveness is marginal.

### ***Exercise***

*From the group - What makes group cohesiveness? How much cohesiveness does this group have now? Why? Paint a picture of this group's cohesiveness by the end of the week. What made the difference?*

**“The achievements of an organization are the result of the combined efforts of each individual.” . . . Vince Lombardi**

## **Ritual & Tradition**

Certain procedures and structure appear to grow out of a need for the group to defend itself against real and imaginary dangers from the environment surrounding the group, from within the individual, or from the group itself. Simple rituals such as seating arrangements, the way meetings begin, and inside jokes may offer group members a feeling of control and predictability. Rituals and traditions may also be more irrational, bizarre, and self-destructive.

Collective behavior is, therefore, influenced by both rational and irrational processes, as in myth, fantasy, tradition, and ritual. Established groups also impose their norms on individuals, even strong dominant individuals.

## **Social Structure**

According to psychologists Wertheimer, Kohler, and Koffka, behavior is determined by the organized system of forces in which the individual is embedded. Social positions and roles exist on the job, in the family, and everywhere people interact. Student, boss, colleague, wife, manager, parent, sales clerk, coach – all are ways of identifying roles, positions, statuses, or offices, and certain patterns of behavior go with particular positions or roles. Each person within a culture learns how the patterns work.

**“There can be no happiness if the things we believe in are different from the things we do.” . . . Freta Stark**

## **Group Roles**

Group behavior is not random behavior. Studies of group development quickly reveal pattern and order amid varying degrees of surface confusion. Role refers to a set of expectations shared by group members concerning the behavior of a person who occupies a given position in the group. Every group faces the problem of matching or fitting role with person. The work consists of enabling individuals to express themselves so that feelings and thoughts can be disclosed. Self-imposed constraints may interfere with the disclosure of role-based problems.

## **Summary**

We must understand that subject of “group dynamics”, like so many other topics addressing a given state of humans, is a moving target. In light of study and emerging theories of group behavior, consider the rate of paradigm shifts and changing psychological knowledge that contribute to study results for any given time period. Do people change with age? Do people change with education? Are group interactions constantly changing? The truth is, we live in a dynamic world and all our environment is in a constant state of motion.

The higher a person is on the authority scale, or is in maturity, confidence, self-respect, etc. (regardless of affiliation in military, social, business, religious settings), the more consistent the behavior can be expected; the person at a lower level might see the greater degree of change from one environment to the next. This is to say, the new guy on the block (in the group) is expected to conform to the culture. The more senior members of any group will define culture, roles, behavior, and expectation.

To fully enjoy and appreciate our efforts we need the peace of mind achievement brings. This is best accomplished when we believe our energies are not wasted and we expect others to bring something productive to the table. Demand the most of your time and don't freely relinquish your success to someone who has less demand for their time and little respect for your time. Groups and the time you spend in one or many of them should enhance your life and aid in moving you closer to your goals.

Operating a company without a formal set of rules and regulations is similar to sailing across the ocean without navigational charts. Objectives can seldom be achieved without a how-to approach. Demand goals and objectives for all your groups. If "objectives" are your navigational charts, than "goals" are your rudder.

### **Story**

Charles Goodyear purchased an India-rubber life-preserver as a curiosity. He was told that rubber would be of great value for a thousand things, if cold weather did not make it hard as stone, or summer heat reduce it to liquid. He said, "I can remedy that."

Experiment after experiment failed. The money he put into the research was sunk. His last dollar was spent. His family suffered for the necessities of life. Even his best friends hurried away from him because they thought he was going insane. Once when a man inquired where he might find Goodyear, he was told, "If you see a man with an India rubber cap, an India rubber coat, India rubber shoes, and an India rubber purse in his pocket, with not a cent in it – that is Charles Goodyear."

But Goodyear was not as insane as most people thought. For five years, he battled with obstacles and adversities that would have disheartened men of less determination. Finally, his efforts were crowned with success.

Out of humiliation, hardships, and defeat after defeat, Charles Goodyear won. He turned failure into success, defeat into victory – all because of persistence.

The essence of this story deals with perseverance. I encourage you to surround yourself with the best people possible, people with values, ethics, love, compassion and who are focused on a happy and successful life. These kinds of people make the best groups. Guard your time and let no one redirect your path toward your goals. Be persistent! Be a true individual! When you take the best people and form a group you will develop the best team possible.

## Organizational Behavior Viewed Over the Past Hundred Years

Time	Leading theorist	Theories or studies
1880's	Max Weber	Bureaucracy, Rational organization, Protestant ethic
1910	Frederick W. Taylor	Traditional organization, "Scientific" management
1920's	Elton Mayo	Hawthorne Western Electric Studies, Import of social and psychological factors
1930's	Ivan Pavlov	Behaviorism
	B. F. Skinner	Behavior modification
	Sigmund Freud	The unconscious, Intrapsychic conflict, Work and love
1938	Kurt Lewin	Leadership and organization, Autocracy, Democracy, Laissez-faire
1946	Kurt Lewin	Group dynamics, Tavistock Institute, Formation of National Training Laboratories
1943-1950	Abraham H. Maslow Carl R. Rogers	Human potential Self-actualization studies
1953	David C. McClelland	Achievement motive, Drive measurement, Challenge
1953-1954	Ludwig von Bertalaffy Norbert Wiener	General systems theory
1960	Douglas M. McGregor	Human side of enterprise, Theory X and Theory Y
1967	R. and J. G. Likert D. Katz and R. L. Kahn	The human organization, Fourfold systems, Authoritative-participative systems Social psychology of organizations, a holistic perspective
1980s		Eclectic organizations Intrinsic motivation Adaptive strategies Implicit bargaining Job enrichment Organizational development Quality circles Redesign of work Selective participative systems Quality of work life