

GROUP PROCESSES

In general, a collection of people is a group when it possesses these qualities:

- A definable membership: a collection of two or more people identifiable by name or type.
- Group Consciousness: the members think of themselves as a group, have a "collective perception of unity."
- A shared sense of purpose.
- Interdependence in satisfaction of needs: the members need the help of one another to accomplish the purposes for which they joined the group.
- Interaction: the members communicate with each other, influence each other, react to one another.
- Ability to act in a unitary manner: the group can behave as a single unit.

CONTENT VS. PROCESS

It is important to note that there is a distinction between what a group is talking about and how the group is dealing with its communication. When we observe what the group is talking about, we are focusing on the content. When we try to observe how the group is handling the content, i.e., who talks, how much or who talks to whom, we are focusing on group process.

Most topics of group discussion emphasize the content--"What makes a good leader?" "What can we do to increase school spirit?" "How can we make meetings more effective?" and concern issues which are "there and then" and not involving the individual directly. In focusing on group process, we are looking at what the group is doing in the "here and now," how it is working in the sense of its present procedures and organization. At a simpler level, looking at process really means to focus on what is going on in the group and trying to understand it in terms of other things that have happened in the group.

PROPERTIES OF GROUPS

In studying all types of groups, certain properties that all groups are believed to possess have been identified.

- A. Background - Each group has a historical background or lack of it which influences its behavior. A new group coming together for the first time may have to devote much of its early energy to getting acquainted with one another and with the group's goals as well as establishing ways of working together. Members come into a meeting with some expectations about it. In some cases the boundaries around the group's freedom or action may be narrowly defined by the conditions under which it was created.

Some questions that help to understand a group's background are:

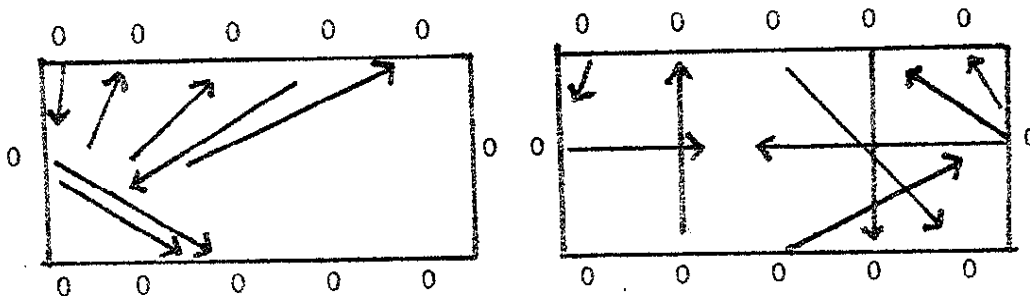
- How well were members prepared to enter the group?
- What are their expectations about the group and their role in it?
- What is the composition of the group--what kind of people? What is their previous experience, prior friendship patterns? How were group members selected?
- What arrangements have been made for their meeting--physical setting? resources?

- B. Participation Patterns - At any given time every group has a participation pattern. For instance, it may be all one-way, with the leader talking to the group members, or it may be two-way, or multi-directional. In a given group this pattern may be consistent, or it may vary from time to time.

Some questions to ask which may reveal participation patterns are:

- Who talks? For how long? How often?
- Who do people look at when they talk?
 - a. single others, possibly potential supporters
 - b. scanning the group
 - c. the leaders
 - d. no one
- Do the members who don't talk seem to be interested and listening?

It is sometimes useful to chart the participation pattern of groups during periodic segments of a meeting. For example:



- C. Communication - This property has to do with how well group members are understanding one another--how clearly they are communicating their ideas, values and feelings. If some members are using a highly specialized vocabulary, they may be talking over the heads of the rest of the group.

Do members frequently pick up contributions previously made and build on them with their own ideas? Do members feel free to ask for clarification when they don't understand a statement? Are responses to statements frequently irrelevant?

- D. Cohesion - The cohesiveness of a group is determined by the bonds that bind the individual parts together into a unified whole. This property indicates the morale, the team spirit, the strength of attraction of the group for its members, and the interest of the members in what the group is doing. Signs of low cohesion include the emergence of cliques, factions, and such subgroupings as the "old timers" versus the "newcomers."

How well is the group working together as a unit?

What subgroups are there and how do they affect the group?

Do members refer to the group as "my group," "our group," "his group," or "their group?"

- E. Standards - Every group tends to develop a code of ethics or set of standards about what is proper and acceptable behavior. Which subjects may be discussed, which are taboo; how openly members may express their feelings; the propriety of volunteering one's services the length and frequency of statements considered allowable. A group might be confused about what its standards are, and this may lead to embarrassment, irritation and lost momentum.

What evidence is there that the group has a code of ethics regarding such matters as self-discipline, sense of responsibility, tolerance of differences, freedom of expression, etc.?

Are there any marked deviations from these standards by one or more members of the group? With what effect?

Do these standards seem to be well understood by all members?

Which of the group's standards seem to help, and which seem to hinder the group's progress?

- F. Sociometric Pattern - In every group the participants tend very soon to begin to identify certain individuals that they like or agree with more than other members. These subtle relationships of friendship and antipathy have an important influence on the group's activities. There is some evidence that indicates that people tend to agree more strongly and more often with people they like and to disagree more often with people they dislike, even though both express the same ideas.

Which members tend to identify with and support one another?

Which members seem repeatedly in disagreement?

Do some members act as "triggers" to others, causing them to respond immediately after the first members' comments, either pro or con?

- G. Goals - All groups have goals, some long-range, i.e., "to promote the welfare of children and youth," or shorter range objective--"to plan a panel discussion on youth." Some goals are clearly defined, specific and publicly understood, and others may be vague, general and only implicit.

How does the group arrive at its goals?

Are all members clear about them?

Are all members committed to them?

Are they realistic and attainable for the group?

WHAT TO OBSERVE IN A GROUP

One way to learn in a lab is to observe and analyze what is happening in one's group. All of us have spent our lives in groups of various sorts--family, gang, team, work groups, etc., but rarely have we taken the time to stop and observe what was going on in the group, or why the members were behaving the way they were. One of our main goals here is to become better observers and better participants.

But what do we look for? What is there to see in a group?

I. Content vs. Process

When we observe what the group is talking about, we are focusing on the content. When we try to observe how the group is handling its communication, i.e., who talks, how much or who talks to whom, we are focusing on group process.

Most topics about the back-home situation emphasize the content-- "what is good leadership," "how can I motivate my subordinate," "how can we make meetings more effective," and concern issues which are "there and then" in the sense of being abstract, future or past oriented and not involving us directly. In focusing on group process, we are looking at what our group is doing in the "here and now", how it is working in the sense of its present procedures and organization.

In fact, the content of the conversation is often the best clue as to what process issue may be on people's minds, when they find it difficult to confront the issue directly. For example.

<u>Content</u>	<u>Process</u>
1. Talking about problems of authority back home may mean.....	That there is a leadership struggle going on in the group
2. Talking about how bad group meetings usually are at the plant may mean.....	that members are dissatisfied with the performance of their own group
3. Talking about leaders who don't really help anybody may mean...	dissatisfaction with the leader's role in the group.

At a simpler level looking at process really means to focus on what is going on in the group and trying to understand it in terms of other things that have gone on in the group.

II. Communication

One of the easiest aspects of group process to observe is the pattern of communication:

1. Who talks? For how long? How often?
2. Who do people look at when they talk?
 - a. single others, possible potential supporters
 - b. scanning the group
 - c. no one
3. Who talks after whom, or who interrupts whom?
4. What style of communication is used (assertions, questions, tone of voice, gestures, etc.)?

The kinds of observations we make give us clues to other important things which may be going on in the group such as who leads whom or who influences whom.

III. Decision-Making Procedures

Whether we are aware of it or not, groups are making decisions all the time, some of them consciously and in reference to the major tasks at hand, some of them without much awareness and in reference to group procedures or standards of operation. It is important to observe how decisions are made in a group in order to assess the appropriateness of the decision to the matter being decided on, and order to assess whether the consequences of given methods are really what the group members bargained for.

Group decisions are notoriously hard to undo. When someone says, "Well, we decided to do it, didn't we?" Any budding opposition is quickly immobilized. (We can only undo the decision if we reconstruct it and understand how we made it and test whether this method was appropriate or not.)

Some methods by which groups make decisions:

1. The Plop: "I think we should introduce ourselves".....
silence
2. The Self-Authorized Agenda: "I think we should introduce ourselves, my name is Joe Smith....."
3. The Handclasp: "I wonder if it would be helpful if we introduced ourselves?" "I think it would, my name is Pete Jones....."

4. "Does anyone object?" or "we all agree."
5. Majority-Minority voting.
6. Polling: "Let's see where everyone stands, what do you think?"
7. Consensus Testing: Genuine exploration to test for opposition and to determine whether opposition feels strongly enough not to be willing to implement decision, not necessarily unanimity, but essential agreement by all.

IV. Task - Maintenance - Self-oriented Behavior

Behavior in the group can be viewed from the point of view of what its purpose or function seems to be. When a member says something, is he primarily trying to get the group task accomplished (task), or is he trying to improve or patch up some relationships among members (maintenance), or is he primarily meeting some personal need or goal without regard to the group's problems (self-oriented)?

As the group grows and member needs become integrated with group goals, there will be less self-oriented behavior and more task or maintenance behavior. What kinds of categories can we identify?

Types of behavior relevant to the group's fulfillment of its task?

1. Initiating: Proposing tasks or goals, defining a group problem; suggesting a procedure or ideas for solving a problem...
2. Seeking information or opinions: Requesting facts: seeking relevant information about group concern... Asking for expressions of feeling: requesting a statement or estimate: soliciting expressions of value: seeking suggestions and ideas....
3. Giving information or opinion: Offering facts: providing relevant information about group concern...
Stating a belief about a matter before the group, giving suggestions and ideas.
4. Clarifying and Elaborating: Interpreting ideas or suggestions; clearing up confusions, defining terms, indicating alternatives and issues before the group....
5. Summarizing: Pulling together related ideas: restating suggestions after the group has discussed them: offering a decision or conclusion for the group to accept or reject....

6. Consensus Testing: Asking to see if group is nearing a decision; sending up trial balloon to test a possible conclusion.

Types of behavior relevant to the group's remaining in good working order, having a good climate for task work, and good relationships which permit maximum use of member resources, i.e., group maintenance.

1. Harmonizing: Attempting to reconcile disagreements, reducing tension getting people to explore differences...
2. Gate Keeping: Helping to keep communication channels open; facilitating the participation of others, suggesting procedures that permit sharing remarks..
3. Encouraging: Being friendly, warm, and responsive to others; indication by facial expression or remark the acceptance of others' contributions.
4. Compromising: When own idea or status is involved in a conflict, offering a compromise which yields status; admitting error, modifying in interest of group cohesion or growth.
5. Standard Setting and Testing: Testing whether group is satisfied with its procedure or suggesting procedures, pointing out explicit or implicit norms which have been set to make them available for testing...

Every group needs both kinds of behavior and needs to work out an adequate balance of task and maintenance activities.

V. Emotional Issues, Causes of Self-Oriented Emotional Behavior

The processes described so far deal with the group's attempts to work, to solve problems of task and maintenance, but there are many forces active in groups which disturb work, which represent a kind of emotional underworld or undercurrent in the stream of group life. These underlying emotional issues produce a variety of emotional behaviors which interfere with or are destructive of effective group functioning. They cannot be ignored or wished away, however. Rather they must be recognized, their causes must be understood, and as the group develops, conditions must be created which permit these same emotional energies to be channeled in the direction of group effort.

What are these issues or basic causes?

1. The problem of identity: Who am I in this group? Where do I fit in? What kind of behavior is acceptable here?

SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT GROUP FUNCTIONING

The following are some questions that may give you some insights into group functioning. As you answer these questions, try to apply them in your small groups.

Communication Patterns

1. Why was more than one person talking at one time?
2. Did I notice any patterns of responses that may indicate sub-groups?
3. How do I feel about the seating arrangement? If I didn't like it, what could I do to change it?
4. Did the noise level of the group ever change? If so, why?
5. To whom are questions and comments usually addressed--the group, the leaders, or a particular member?
6. Did I feel that you were getting across what I wanted to say?
7. Was the manner of presentation of others affecting my listening ability?

Content

1. Would it have helped for me to jot down important thoughts in note form?
2. Did I stick to the topic?
3. Might I have found more value in listing several topics before discussing their merits (brainstorming) rather than getting bogged down on only one?
4. What ideas were presented to the group?
5. Were we too specific?
6. Did the group achieve a common understanding of the problem?
7. When others paraphrased your remarks, did they do it in a concise, accurate way? If not, why not? What could you do to improve this?

Decision Making

1. What blocked forward motion?

2. What aided forward motion?
3. Was a definite decision made? Can you agree to it? Why?
4. Did I feel apart of the decision?
5. When the process became bogged down, would it have been beneficial to take a break and/or start over?
6. Did the group test for general consensus?

Leadership

1. What types of leadership did I perceive? How did I react to it?
2. What kinds of leadership did I fulfill?
3. What kinds of leadership did the group need? What did I do to help attain these needs?
4. Did I perceive any leadership struggles occurring?

Listening

1. If I interrupted someone else, was I really listening to their ideas or thinking of a response?
2. Did I clarify someone else's idea in my mind before offering an alternative?
3. Were the ideas expressed clearly? If not, what could I do to help clarify the ideas?
4. Do I find that I had difficulty in formulating thoughts and listening at the same time? What can I do about it?

Maintenance

1. Did I disagree with anyone at any time? Could I have worded your disagreement in a less threatening way?
2. How can I deal with others needs? And how can I find out what others needs are?
3. Give a one word description of the group, such as warm, cold, free.
4. Do members discard new ideas quickly? Do you explore one idea thoroughly before going on to the next?

Non-Verbal Communication

1. Who did I look at when I spoke?
2. How did I react to people's facial expressions?

Personal Performance

1. What things did I do in the group that you felt good about?
2. What things would I like to work on as an individual? What can I do to work on these?
3. Did I give verbal support to any ideas expressed that I liked?
4. What position in the group did I want to fill? Are there others in the group who were as capable as I to fill these positions? What position in the group did I not want to fill? Why?
5. What was I most uncomfortable about in the group?
6. Did I see myself in opposition to other members in the group? How can I work with them in a positive way?
7. What was my expectations about the group as I entered?
8. Did I feel free to ask for clarification when I didn't understand a statement?

Silence

1. Is a silent lapse of time necessarily bad in group discussions? What happens to my individual thinking during a silent period?
2. How did I deal with silence?
3. Did the more silent members seem interested in listening?
4. What are some non-threatening ways to bring a silent person into discussion?

PROBLEM ROLES IN SMALL GROUPS

ANTI-TASK ROLES: (Hindering the making of a good decision)

ANTI-MAINTENANCE ROLES: (Destroying a good, enjoyable atmosphere in the group)

The aggressor deflates the status of others, expresses disapproval, attacks the group, jokes aggressively, shows envy toward another's contribution.

The blocker stubbornly resists the group beyond reason. Attempts to maintain or bring back an issue after the group has rejected it.

The recognition seeker calls attention to himself. Struggles to prevent his being placed in an "inferior" position.

The dominator tries to assert authority or superiority over the group or over certain members.

The withdrawer tries to remove the source of anxiety or possible embarrassment by mentally "tuning out" the rest of the group or its activities.

Pairing-up is when two or more members form a sub-group and support and protect one another.

USEFULL GUIDELINES

OF

AN EFFECTIVE GROUP

1. Has a clear understanding of its purposes and goals.
2. Is flexible in selecting its procedures as it works toward its goals.
3. Has achieved a high degree of communication and understanding among its members. Communication of personal feelings and attitudes, as well as ideas, occur in a direct and open fashion because they are considered important to the work of the group.
4. Is able to initiate and carry on effective decision making, carefully considering minority viewpoints, and securing the commitment of all members to important decisions.
5. Achieves an appropriate balance between group productivity and the satisfaction of individual needs.
6. Provides for sharing of leadership responsibilities by group members--- so that all members are concerned about contributing ideas, elaborating and clarifying the ideas of others, giving opinions, testing the feasibility of potential decisions, and in other ways helping the group to work on its task and maintain itself as an effective working unit.
7. Has a high degree of cohesiveness (attractiveness for the members) but not to the point of stifling individual freedom.
8. Makes intelligent use of the differing abilities of its members.
9. Is not dominated by its leader or by any of its members.
10. Can be objective about reviewing its own processes. It can face its problems and adjust to needed modifications in its operation.
11. Maintain a balance between emotional and rational behavior, channeling emotionality into productive group effort.