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SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

Forming & Sustaining Teams

EDITED BY JASMINE R. LINABARY, PH.D.

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE BOOK

Small Group Communication: Forming & Sustaining Teams is an interdisciplinary textbook focused on communication in groups and teams. The aim of this textbook is to provide students with theories, concepts, and skills they can put into practice to form and sustain successful groups across a variety of contexts.

This textbook was specifically designed to cover content relevant to SP 315 Small Group Communication at Emporia State University in Emporia, KS.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This open education resource (OER) project was made possible by a Class Resource Affordability Initiative Grant (CRAIG) from Emporia State University. Special thanks to Dr. Cameron Piercy for his contributions and insights. Also thanks to ESU librarian Bethanie O'Dell for her support for this project.

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For questions or revisions related to this book, please contact Dr. Linabary (jlinabar@emporia.edu).

TEXTBOOK FORMAT & ADOPTION

In addition to the open web version, this textbook is available in alternative formats, including PDF versions for electronic use or for printing. Various e-reader versions are also available upon request. Please contact Dr. Linabary (jlinabar@emporia.edu) for details.

PART I.

GROUP & TEAM COMMUNICATION OVERVIEW

This section introduces the basics of small group communication, including key definitions and theories.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCING SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

Learning Objectives

- Define small group communication
- Discuss the characteristics of small groups
- Compare and contrast different types of small groups
- Describe the advantages and disadvantages of small groups

Small group communication refers to interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence, and a shared identity. In this chapter, we will provide an overview of the characteristics and types of small groups and discuss their advantages and disadvantages.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL GROUPS

Different groups have different characteristics, serve different purposes, and can lead to positive, neutral, or negative experiences. While our interpersonal relationships primarily focus on relationship building, small groups usually focus on some sort of task completion or goal accomplishment. A college learning community focused on math and science, a campaign team for a state senator, and a group of local organic farmers are examples of small groups that would all have a different size, structure, identity, and interaction pattern.

SIZE OF SMALL GROUPS

There is no set number of members for the ideal small group. A small group requires a minimum of three people (because two people would be a pair or dyad), but the upper range of group size is contingent on the purpose of the group. When groups grow beyond fifteen to twenty members, it becomes difficult to consider them a small group based on the previous definition. An analysis of the number of unique connections between members of small groups shows that they are deceptively complex. For example, within a six-person group, there are fifteen separate potential dyadic

connections, and a twelve-person group would have sixty-six potential dyadic connections (Hargie, 2011). As you can see, when we double the number of group members, we more than double the number of connections, which shows that network connection points in small groups grow exponentially as membership increases. So, while there is no set upper limit on the number of group members, it makes sense that the number of group members should be limited to those necessary to accomplish the goal or serve the purpose of the group. Small groups that add too many members increase the potential for group members to feel overwhelmed or disconnected.

STRUCTURE OF SMALL GROUPS

Internal and external influences affect a group's structure. In terms of internal influences, member characteristics play a role in initial group formation. For instance, a person who is well informed about the group's task and/or highly motivated as a group member may emerge as a leader and set into motion internal decision-making processes, such as recruiting new members or assigning group roles, that affect the structure of a group (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Different members will also gravitate toward different roles within the group and will advocate for certain procedures and courses of action over others. External factors such as group size, task, and resources also affect group structure. Some groups will have more control over these external factors through decision making than others. For example, a commission that is put together by a legislative body to look into ethical violations in athletic organizations will likely have less control over its external factors than a self-created weekly book club.

A self-formed study group is likely to be less structured than other groups. (Credit: Alexis Brown/Students learning together/Unsplash)

Group structure is also formed through formal and informal network connections. In terms of formal networks, groups may have clearly defined roles and responsibilities or a hierarchy that shows how members are connected. The group itself may also be a part of an organizational hierarchy that networks the group into a larger organizational structure. This type of formal network is especially important in groups that have to report to external stakeholders. These external stakeholders may influence the group's formal network, leaving the group little or no control over its structure. Conversely, groups have more control over their informal networks, which are connections among individuals within the group and among group members and people outside of the group that aren't official. For example, a group member's friend or relative may be able to secure a space to hold a fundraiser at a discounted rate, which helps the group achieve its task. Both types of networks are important because they may help facilitate information exchange within a group and extend a group's reach in order to access other resources.

Size and structure also affect communication within a group (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). In terms of size, the more people in a group, the more issues with scheduling and coordination of communication. Remember that time is an important resource in most group interactions and a resource that is usually strained. Structure can increase or decrease the flow of communication. **Reachability** refers to the way in which one member is or isn't connected to other group members. For example, the "Circle" group structure in **Figure 1** shows that each group member is connected to two other members. This can make coordination easy when only one or two people need to be brought in for a decision. In this

case, Erik and Callie are very reachable by Winston, who could easily coordinate with them. However, if Winston needed to coordinate with Bill or Stephanie, he would have to wait on Erik or Callie to reach that person, which could create delays. The circle can be a good structure for groups who are passing along a task and in which each member is expected to progressively build on the others' work. A group of scholars coauthoring a research paper may work in such a manner, with each person adding to the paper and then passing it on to the next person in the circle. In this case, they can ask the previous person questions and write with the next person's area of expertise in mind. The "Wheel" group structure in Figure 1 shows an alternative organization pattern. In this structure, Tara is very reachable by all members of the group. This can be a useful structure when Tara is the person with the most expertise in the task or the leader who needs to review and approve work at each step before it is passed along to other group members. But Phillip and Shadow, for example, wouldn't likely work together without Tara being involved.

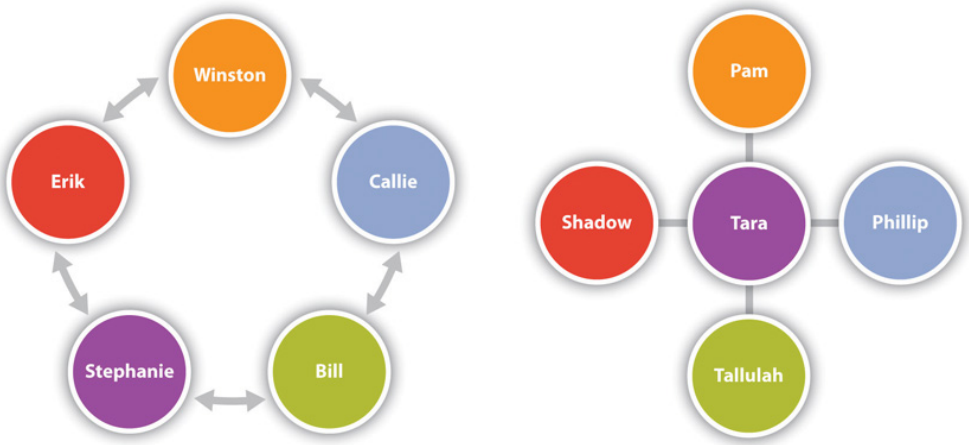

Figure 1: *Small Group Structures (Credit: University of Minnesota Press/Small Group Structures/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)*

Looking at the group structures, we can make some assumptions about the communication that takes place in them. The wheel is an example of a centralized structure, while the circle is decentralized. Research has shown that centralized groups are better than decentralized groups in terms of speed and efficiency (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). But decentralized groups are more effective at solving complex problems. In centralized groups like the wheel, the person with the most connections, person C, is also more likely to be the leader of the group or at least have more status among group members, largely because that person has a broad perspective of what's going on in the group. The most central person can also act as a gatekeeper. Since this person has access to the most information, which is usually a sign of leadership or status, he or she could consciously decide to limit the flow of information. But in complex tasks, that person could become overwhelmed by the burden of processing and sharing information with all the other group members. The circle structure is more likely to emerge in groups where collaboration is the goal and a specific task and course of action isn't required under time constraints. While the person who initiated the group or has the most expertise in regards to the task may emerge as a leader in a decentralized group, the equal access to information lessens the hierarchy and potential for gatekeeping that is present in the more centralized groups.

INTERDEPENDENCE

Small groups exhibit **interdependence,** meaning they share a common purpose and a common fate. If the actions of one or two group members lead to a group deviating from or not achieving their purpose, then all members of the group are affected. Conversely, if the actions of only a few of the group members lead to success, then all members of the group benefit. This is a major contributor to many college students' dislike of group assignments, because they feel a loss of control and independence that they have when they complete an assignment alone. This concern is valid in that their grades might suffer because of the negative actions of someone else or their hard work may go to benefit the group member who just skated by. Group meeting attendance is a clear example of the interdependent nature of group interaction. Many of us have arrived at a group meeting only to find half of the members present. In some cases, the group members who show up have to leave and reschedule because they can't accomplish their task without the other members present. Group members who attend meetings but withdraw or don't participate can also derail group progress. Although it can be frustrating to have your job, grade, or reputation partially dependent on the actions of others, the interdependent nature of groups can also lead to higher-quality performance and output, especially when group members are accountable for their actions.

SHARED IDENTITY

The shared identity of a group manifests in several ways. Groups may have official charters or mission and vision statements that lay out the identity of a group. For example, the Girl Scout mission states that "Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place" (Girl Scouts, 2012). The mission for this large organization influences the identities of the thousands of small groups called troops. Group identity is often formed around a shared goal and/or previous accomplishments, which adds dynamism to the group as it looks toward the future and back on the past to inform its present. Shared identity can also be exhibited through group names, slogans, songs, handshakes, clothing, or other symbols. At a family reunion, for example, matching t-shirts specially made for the occasion, dishes made from recipes passed down from generation to generation, and shared stories of family members that have passed away help establish a shared identity and social reality.

A key element of the formation of a shared identity within a group is the establishment of the in-group as opposed to the out-group. The degree to which members share in the in-group identity varies from person to person and group to group. Even within a family, some members may not attend a reunion or get as excited about the matching t-shirts as others. Shared identity also emerges as groups become **cohesive,** meaning they identify with and like the group's task and other group members. The presence of cohesion and a shared identity leads to a building of trust, which can also positively influence productivity and members' satisfaction.

TYPES OF SMALL GROUPS

There are many types of small groups, but the most common distinction made between types of small groups is that of task-oriented and relational-oriented groups (Hargie, 2011). **Task-oriented groups** are formed to solve a problem, promote a cause, or generate ideas or information (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1995). In such groups, like a committee or study group, interactions and decisions are primarily evaluated based on the quality of the final product or output. The three main types of tasks are production, discussion, and problem-solving tasks (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Groups faced with production tasks are asked to produce something tangible from their group interactions such as a report, design for a playground, musical performance, or fundraiser event. Groups faced with discussion tasks are asked to talk through something without trying to come up with a right or wrong answer. Examples of this type of group include a support group for people with HIV/AIDS, a book club, or a group for new fathers. Groups faced with problem-solving tasks have to devise a course of action to meet a specific need. These groups also usually include a production and discussion component, but the end goal isn't necessarily a tangible product or a shared social reality through discussion. Instead, the end goal is a well-thought-out idea. Task-oriented groups require honed problem-solving skills to accomplish goals, and the structure of these groups is more rigid than that of relational-oriented groups.

Relational-oriented groups are formed to promote interpersonal connections and are more focused on quality interactions that contribute to the well-being of group members. Decision making is directed at strengthening or repairing relationships rather than completing discrete tasks or debating specific ideas or courses of action. All groups include task and relational elements, so it's best to think of these orientations as two ends of a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive. For example, although a family unit works together daily to accomplish tasks like getting the kids ready for school and friendship groups may plan a surprise party for one of the members, their primary and most meaningful interactions are still relational. Since other chapters in this book focus specifically on interpersonal relationships, this chapter focuses more on task-oriented groups and the dynamics that operate within these groups.

To more specifically look at the types of small groups that exist, we can examine why groups form. Some groups are formed based on interpersonal relationships. Our family and friends are considered **primary groups**, or long-lasting groups that are formed based on relationships and include significant others. These are the small groups in which we interact most frequently. They form the basis of our society and our individual social realities. Kinship networks provide important support early in life and meet physiological and safety needs, which are essential for survival. They also meet higher-order needs such as social and self-esteem needs. When people do not interact with their biological family, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, they can establish fictive kinship networks, which are composed of people who are not biologically related but fulfill family roles and help provide the same support.

We also interact in many **secondary groups**, which are characterized by less frequent face-to-face interactions, less emotional and relational communication, and more task-related communication than primary groups (Barker, 1991). While we are more likely to participate in secondary groups

based on self-interest, our primary-group interactions are often more reciprocal or other oriented. For example, we may join groups because of a shared interest or need.

Groups formed based on shared interest include social groups and leisure groups such as a group of independent film buffs, science fiction fans, or bird watchers. Some groups form to meet the needs of individuals or of a particular group of people. Examples of groups that meet the needs of individuals include study groups or support groups like a weight loss group. These groups are focused on individual needs, even though they meet as a group, and they are also often discussion oriented. Service groups, on the other hand, work to meet the needs of individuals but are task oriented. Service groups include Habitat for Humanity and Rotary Club chapters, among others. Still, other groups form around a shared need, and their primary task is advocacy. For example, the Gay Men's Health Crisis is a group that was formed by a small group of eight people in the early 1980s to advocate for resources and support for the still relatively unknown disease that would later be known as AIDS. Similar groups form to advocate for everything from a stop sign at a neighborhood intersection to the end of human trafficking.

As we already learned, other groups are formed primarily to accomplish a task. **Teams** are task-oriented groups in which members are especially loyal and dedicated to the task and other group members (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). In professional and civic contexts, the word *team* has become popularized as a means of drawing on the positive connotations of the term—connotations such as "high-spirited," "cooperative," and "hardworking." Scholars who have spent years studying highly effective teams have identified several common factors related to their success. Successful teams have (Adler & Elmhorst, 2005)

- clear and inspiring shared goals,
- a results-driven structure,
- competent team members,
- a collaborative climate,
- high standards for performance,
- external support and recognition, and
- ethical and accountable leadership.

Increasingly, small groups and teams are engaging in more virtual interaction. **Virtual teams** take advantage of new technologies and meet exclusively or primarily online to achieve their purpose or goal. Some virtual groups may complete their task without ever being physically face-to-face. Virtual groups bring with them distinct advantages and disadvantages that you can read more about in the "Getting Plugged In" feature next.

GETTING PLUGGED IN

Virtual groups and teams are now common in academic, professional, and personal contexts, as classes meet

entirely online, work teams interface using webinar or video-conferencing programs, and people connect around shared interests in a variety of online settings. Virtual groups are popular in professional contexts because they can bring together people who are geographically dispersed (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). Virtual groups also increase the possibility for the inclusion of diverse members. The ability to transcend distance means that people with diverse backgrounds and diverse perspectives are more easily accessed than in many offline groups.

One disadvantage of virtual groups stems from the difficulties that technological mediation presents for the relational and social dimensions of group interactions (Walther & Bunz, 2005). An important part of coming together as a group is the socialization of group members into the desired norms of the group. Since norms are implicit, much of this information is learned through observation or conveyed informally from one group member to another. In fact, in traditional groups, group members passively acquire 50 percent or more of their knowledge about group norms and procedures, meaning they observe rather than directly ask (Comer, 1991). Virtual groups experience more difficulty with this part of socialization than copresent traditional groups do, since any form of electronic mediation takes away some of the richness present in face-to-face interaction.

To help overcome these challenges, members of virtual groups should be prepared to put more time and effort into building the relational dimensions of their group. Members of virtual groups need to make the social cues that guide new members' socialization more explicit than they would in an offline group (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). Group members should also contribute often, even if just supporting someone else's contribution, because increased participation has been shown to increase liking among members of virtual groups (Walther & Bunz, 2005). Virtual group members should also make an effort to put relational content that might otherwise be conveyed through nonverbal or contextual means into the verbal part of a message, as members who include little social content in their messages or only communicate about the group's task are more negatively evaluated. Virtual groups who do not overcome these challenges will likely struggle to meet deadlines, interact less frequently, and experience more absenteeism. What follows are some guidelines to help optimize virtual groups (Walter & Bunz, 2005):

- Get started interacting as a group as early as possible, since it takes longer to build social cohesion.
- Interact frequently to stay on task and avoid having work build up.
- Start working toward completing the task while initial communication about setup, organization, and procedures are taking place.
- Respond overtly to other people's messages and contributions.
- Be explicit about your reactions and thoughts since typical nonverbal expressions may not be received as easily in virtual groups as they would be in colocated groups.
- Set deadlines and stick to them.

Discussion Questions:

1. Make a list of some virtual groups to which you currently belong or have belonged to in the past. What are some differences between your experiences in virtual groups versus traditional colocated groups?
2. What are some group tasks or purposes that you think lend themselves to being accomplished in a virtual setting? What are some group tasks or purposes that you think would be best handled in a traditional colocated setting? Explain your answers for each.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF SMALL GROUPS

As with anything, small groups have their advantages and disadvantages. Advantages of small groups include shared decision making, shared resources, synergy, and exposure to diversity. It is within small groups that most of the decisions that guide our country, introduce local laws, and influence our family interactions are made. In a democratic society, participation in decision making is a key part of citizenship. Groups also help in making decisions involving judgment calls that have ethical implications or the potential to negatively affect people. Individuals making such high-stakes decisions in a vacuum could have negative consequences given the lack of feedback, input, questioning, and proposals for alternatives that would come from group interaction. Group members also help expand our social networks, which provide access to more resources. A local community-theater group may be able to put on a production with a limited budget by drawing on these connections to get set-building supplies, props, costumes, actors, and publicity in ways that an individual could not. The increased knowledge, diverse perspectives, and access to resources that groups possess relates to another advantage of small groups—synergy.

Synergy refers to the potential for gains in performance or heightened quality of interactions when complementary members or member characteristics are added to existing ones (Larson Jr., 2010). Because of synergy, the final group product can be better than what any individual could have produced alone. When I worked in housing and residence life, I helped coordinate a "World Cup Soccer Tournament" for the international students that lived in my residence hall. As a group, we created teams representing different countries around the world, made brackets for people to track progress and predict winners, got sponsors, gathered prizes, and ended up with a very successful event that would not have been possible without the synergy created by our collective group membership. The members of this group were also exposed to international diversity that enriched our experiences, which is also an advantage of group communication.

Working in groups and teams can have several advantages, including in exposing us to new people and perspectives. (Credit: Jopwell/Group of People Sitting Inside a Room/Pexels)

Participating in groups can also increase our exposure to diversity and broaden our perspectives. Although groups vary in the diversity of their members, we can strategically choose groups that expand our diversity, or we can unintentionally end up in a diverse group. When we participate in small groups, we expand our social networks, which increase the possibility to interact with people who have different cultural identities than ourselves. Since group members work together toward a common goal, shared identification with the task or group can give people with diverse backgrounds a sense of commonality that they might not have otherwise. Even when group members share cultural identities, the diversity of experience and opinion within a group can lead to broadened perspectives as alternative ideas are presented and opinions are challenged and defended. One of my favorite parts of facilitating class discussion is when students with different identities and/or perspectives teach one another things in ways that I could not on my own. This example brings together the potential of synergy and diversity. People who are more introverted or just avoid group communication and voluntarily distance themselves from groups—or are rejected from groups—risk losing opportunities to learn more about others and themselves.

There are also disadvantages to small group interaction. In some cases, one person can be just as or more effective than a group of people. Think about a situation in which a highly specialized skill or knowledge is needed to get something done. In this situation, one very knowledgeable person is

probably a better fit for the task than a group of less knowledgeable people. Group interaction also has a tendency to slow down the decision-making process. Individuals connected through a hierarchy or chain of command often work better in situations where decisions must be made under time constraints. When group interaction does occur under time constraints, having one "point person" or leader who coordinates action and gives final approval or disapproval on ideas or suggestions for actions is best.

Group communication also presents interpersonal challenges. A common problem is coordinating and planning group meetings due to busy and conflicting schedules. Some people also have difficulty with the other-centeredness and self-sacrifice that some groups require. The interdependence of group members that we discussed earlier can also create some disadvantages. Group members may take advantage of the anonymity of a group and engage in **social loafing,** meaning they contribute less to the group than other members or than they would if working alone (Karau & Williams, 1993). Social loafers expect that no one will notice their behaviors or that others will pick up their slack. It is this potential for social loafing that makes many students and professionals dread group work, especially those who have a tendency to cover for other group members to prevent the social loafer from diminishing the group's productivity or output.

IMPROVING YOUR GROUP EXPERIENCES

If you experience feelings of fear and dread when an instructor says you will need to work in a group, you may experience what is called **grouphate** (Meyers & Goodboy, 2005). Like many of you, I also had some negative group experiences in college that made me think similarly to a student who posted the following on a teaching blog: "Group work is code for 'work as a group for a grade less than what you can get if you work alone'" (Weimer, 2008).

But then I took a course called "Small Group and Team Communication" with an amazing teacher who later became one of my most influential mentors. She emphasized the fact that we all needed to increase our knowledge about group communication and group dynamics in order to better our group communication experiences—and she was right. So the first piece of advice to help you start improving your group experiences is to closely study the group communication chapters in this textbook and to apply what you learn to your group interactions. Neither students nor faculty are born knowing how to function as a group, yet students and faculty often think we're supposed to learn as we go, which increases the likelihood of a negative experience.

A second piece of advice is to meet often with your group (Myers & Goodboy, 2005). Of course, to do this you have to overcome some scheduling and coordination difficulties, but putting other things aside to work as a group helps set up a norm that group work is important and worthwhile. Regular meetings also allow members to interact with each other, which can increase social bonds, build a sense of interdependence that can help diminish social loafing, and establish other important rules and norms that will guide future group interaction. Instead of committing to frequent meetings, many student groups use their first meeting to equally divide up the group's tasks so they can then go off and work alone (not as a group). While some group work can definitely be done independently, dividing up the work and assigning someone to put it all together doesn't allow group members to take advantage of one of the most powerful advantages of group work—synergy.

Last, establish group expectations and follow through with them. I recommend that my students come up with a group name and create a contract of group guidelines during their first meeting (both of which I learned from

my group communication teacher whom I referenced earlier). The group name helps begin to establish a shared identity, which then contributes to interdependence and improves performance. The contract of group guidelines helps make explicit the group norms that might have otherwise been left implicit. Each group member contributes to the contract and then they all sign it. Groups often make guidelines about how meetings will be run, what to do about lateness and attendance, the type of climate they'd like for discussion, and other relevant expectations. If group members end up falling short of these expectations, the other group members can remind the straying member of the contact and the fact that he or she signed it. If the group encounters further issues, they can use the contract as a basis for evaluating the other group member or for communicating with the instructor.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the student's quote about group work that was included at the beginning? Why or why not?
2. The second recommendation is to meet more with your group. Acknowledging that schedules are difficult to coordinate and that that is not really going to change, what are some strategies that you could use to overcome that challenge in order to get time together as a group?
3. What are some guidelines that you think you'd like to include in your contract with a future group?

Review & Reflection Questions

- What are the key characteristics of small groups?
- List some groups to which you have belonged that focused primarily on tasks and then list some that focused primarily on relationships. Compare and contrast your experiences in these groups.
- Synergy is one of the main advantages of small group communication. Explain a time when a group you were in benefited from or failed to achieve synergy. What contributed to your success/failure?
- Do you experience grouphate? If so, why might that be the case? What strategies could you use to have better group experiences in the future?

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AUTHORS & ATTRIBUTION

The chapter is adapted from "Understanding Small Groups" in *Communication in the Real World* from the University of Minnesota. The book was adapted from a work produced and distributed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA) by a publisher who has requested that they and the original author not receive attribution. This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

PART II.

FORMING GROUPS

This section provides information on the key processes and practices in the initial stages of group formation.

CHAPTER 2.

UNDERSTANDING GROUP FORMATION

Learning Objectives

- Explain the reasons why people join groups
- Describe how groups impact task performance
- Identify what makes groups most effective
- Discuss the utility of descriptive models of group development

This chapter assumes that a thorough understanding of people requires a thorough understanding of groups. Each of us is an autonomous individual seeking our own objectives, yet we are also members of groups—groups that constrain us, guide us, and sustain us. Just as each of us influences the group and the people in the group, so, too, do groups change each one of us. Joining groups satisfies our need to belong, gain information and understanding through social comparison, define our sense of self and social identity, and achieve goals that might elude us if we worked alone. Groups are also practically significant, for much of the world's work is done by groups rather than by individuals. Success sometimes eludes our groups, but when group members learn to work together as a cohesive team their success becomes more certain.

Psychologists study groups because nearly all human activities—working, learning, worshiping, relaxing, playing, and even sleeping—occur in groups. The lone individual who is cut off from all groups is a rarity. Most of us live out our lives in groups, and these groups have a profound impact on our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Many psychologists focus their attention on single individuals, but social psychologists expand their analysis to include groups, organizations, communities, and even cultures.

This chapter examines the psychology of groups and group membership. It begins with a basic question: What is the psychological significance of groups? This chapter then reviews some of the key findings from studies of groups. Researchers have asked many questions about people and groups: Do people work as hard as they can when they are in groups? Are groups more cautious than individuals?

Do groups make wiser decisions than single individuals? In many cases, the answers are not what common sense and folk wisdom might suggest.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GROUPS

Many people loudly proclaim their autonomy and independence. Like Ralph Waldo Emerson (1903/2004), they avow, "I must be myself. I will not hide my tastes or aversions . . . . I will seek my own" (p. 127). Even though people are capable of living separately and apart from others, they join with others because groups meet their psychological and social needs.

THE NEED TO BELONG

Across individuals, societies, and even eras, humans consistently seek inclusion over exclusion, membership over isolation, and acceptance over rejection. As Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary (1995) conclude, humans have a need to belong: "a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and impactful interpersonal relationships" (p. 497). And most of us satisfy this need by joining groups. When surveyed, 87.3% of Americans reported that they lived with other people, including family members, partners, and roommates (Davis & Smith, 2007). The majority, ranging from 50% to 80%, reported regularly doing things in groups, such as attending a sports event together, visiting one another for the evening, sharing a meal together, or going out as a group to see a movie (Putnam, 2000).

The need to belong is a strong psychological motivation. (Credit: CC0 Public Domain)

People respond negatively when their need to belong is unfulfilled. People who are accepted members of a group tend to feel happier and more satisfied. But should they be rejected by a group, they feel unhappy, helpless, and depressed. Studies of **ostracism**—the deliberate exclusion from groups—indicate this experience is highly stressful and can lead to depression, confused thinking, and even aggression (Williams, 2007). When researchers used a functional magnetic resonance imaging scanner to track neural responses to exclusion, they found that people who were left out of a group activity displayed heightened cortical activity in two specific areas of the brain—the dorsal anterior cingulate cortex and the anterior insula. These areas of the brain are associated with the experience of physical pain sensations (Eisenberger et al., 2003). It hurts, quite literally, to be left out of a group.

AFFILIATION IN GROUPS

Groups not only satisfy the need to belong, but they also provide members with information, assistance, and social support. Leon Festinger's theory of **social comparison** (1950, 1954) suggested

that in many cases people join with others to evaluate the accuracy of their personal beliefs and attitudes. Stanley Schachter (1959) explored this process by putting individuals in ambiguous, stressful situations and asking them if they wished to wait alone or with others. He found that people *affiliate* in such situations—they seek the company of others.

Although any kind of companionship is appreciated, we prefer those who provide us with reassurance and support as well as accurate information. In some cases, we also prefer to join with others who are even worse off than we are. Imagine, for example, how you would respond when the teacher hands back the test and yours is marked 85%. Do you want to affiliate with a friend who got a 95% or a friend who got a 78%? To maintain a sense of self-worth, people seek out and compare themselves to the less fortunate. This process is known as *downward social comparison*.

IDENTITY AND MEMBERSHIP

Groups are not only founts of information during times of ambiguity, they also help us answer the existentially significant question, "Who am I?" People are defined not only by their traits, preferences, interests, likes, and dislikes, but also by their friendships, social roles, family connections, and group memberships. The self is not just a "me," but also a "we."

Even demographic qualities such as sex or age can influence us if we categorize ourselves based on these qualities. Social identity theory, for example, assumes that we don't just classify *other* people into such social categories as man, woman, White, Black, Latinx, elderly, or college student, but we also categorize ourselves. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), social identities are directed by our memberships in particular groups. or social categories. If we strongly identify with these categories, then we will ascribe the characteristics of the typical member of these groups to ourselves, and so stereotype ourselves. If, for example, we believe that college students are intellectual, then we will assume we, too, are intellectual if we identify with that group (Hogg, 2001).

Groups also provide a variety of means for maintaining and enhancing a sense of self-worth, as our assessment of the quality of groups we belong to influences our **collective self-esteem** (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). If our self-esteem is shaken by a personal setback, we can focus on our group's success and prestige. In addition, by comparing our group to other groups, we frequently discover that we are members of the better group, and so can take pride in our superiority. By denigrating other groups, we elevate both our personal and our collective self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Mark Leary's (2007) **sociometer model** goes so far as to suggest that "self-esteem is part of a sociometer that monitors peoples' relational value in other people's eyes" (p. 328). He maintains self-esteem is not just an index of one's sense of personal value, but also an indicator of acceptance into groups. Like a gauge that indicates how much fuel is left in the tank, a dip in self-esteem indicates exclusion from our group is likely. Disquieting feelings of self-worth, then, prompt us to search for and correct characteristics and qualities that put us at risk of social exclusion. Self-esteem is not just high self-regard, but the self-approbation that we feel when included in groups (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

EVOLUTIONARY ADVANTAGES OF GROUP LIVING

Groups may be humans' most useful invention, for they provide us with the means to reach goals that would elude us if we remained alone. Individuals in groups can secure advantages and avoid disadvantages that would plague the lone individuals. In his theory of social integration, Moreland (1987) concludes that groups tend to form whenever "people become dependent on one another for the satisfaction of their needs" (p. 104). The advantages of group life may be so great that humans are biologically prepared to seek membership and avoid isolation. From an evolutionary psychology perspective, because groups have increased humans' overall fitness for countless generations, individuals who carried genes that promoted solitude-seeking were less likely to survive and procreate compared to those with genes that prompted them to join groups (Darwin, 1859/1963). This process of natural selection culminated in the creation of a modern human who seeks out membership in groups instinctively, for most of us are descendants of "joiners" rather than "loners."

MOTIVATION AND PERFORMANCE

SOCIAL FACILITATION IN GROUPS

Do people perform more effectively when alone or when part of a group? Norman Triplett (1898) examined this issue in one of the first empirical studies in psychology. While watching bicycle races, Triplett noticed that cyclists were faster when they competed against other racers than when they raced alone against the clock. To determine if the presence of others leads to the psychological stimulation that enhances performance, he arranged for 40 children to play a game that involved turning a small reel as quickly as possible (see Figure 1). When he measured how quickly they turned the reel, he confirmed that children performed slightly better when they played the game in pairs compared to when they played alone (see Stroebe, 2012; Strube, 2005).

Triplett succeeded in sparking interest in a phenomenon now known as **social facilitation:** the enhancement of an individual's performance when that person works in the presence of other people. However, it remained for Robert Zajonc (1965) to specify when social facilitation does and does not occur. After reviewing prior research, Zajonc noted that the facilitating effects of an audience usually only occur when the task requires the person to perform *dominant responses* (i.e., ones that are well-learned or based on instinctive behaviors). If the task requires *nondominant responses* (i.e., novel, complicated, or untried behaviors that the organism has never performed before or has performed only infrequently) then the presence of others inhibits performance. Hence, students write poorer quality essays on complex philosophical questions when they labor in a group rather than alone (Allport, 1924), but they make fewer mistakes in solving simple, low-level multiplication problems with an audience or a co-actor than when they work in isolation (Dashiell, 1930).

Social facilitation, then, depends on the task: *other people facilitate performance when the task is so simple that it requires only dominant responses, but others interfere when the task requires nondominant responses.* However, a number of psychological processes combine to influence when social facilitation, not social interference, occurs. Studies of the challenge-threat response and brain imaging, for example, confirm that we respond physiologically and neurologically to the presence of others (Blascovich et al., 1999). Other people also can trigger *evaluation apprehension,* particularly when we feel that our individual performance will be known to others, and those others might judge it negatively (Bond et

al., 1996). The presence of other people can also cause perturbations in our capacity to concentrate on and process information (Harkins, 2006). Distractions due to the presence of other people have been shown to improve performance on certain tasks, such as the *Stroop task*, but undermine performance on more cognitively demanding tasks (Huguet et al., 1999).

SOCIAL LOAFING

Groups usually outperform individuals. A single student, working alone on a paper, will get less done in an hour than will four students working on a group project. One person playing a tug-of-war game against a group will lose. A crew of movers can pack up and transport your household belongings faster than you can by yourself. As the saying goes, "Many hands make light the work" (Littlepage, 1991; Steiner, 1972).

Groups, though, tend to be underachievers. Studies of social facilitation confirmed the positive motivational benefits of working with other people on well-practiced tasks in which each member's contribution to the collective enterprise can be identified and evaluated. But what happens when tasks require a truly collective effort? First, when people work together they must coordinate their individual activities and contributions to reach the maximum level of efficiency—but they rarely do (Diehl & Stroebe, 1987). Three people in a tug-of-war competition, for example, invariably pull and pause at slightly different times, so their efforts are uncoordinated. The result is *coordination loss*: the three-person group is stronger than a single person, but not three times as strong**.** Second, people just don't exert as much effort when working on a collective endeavor, nor do they expend as much cognitive effort trying to solve problems, as they do when working alone. They display **social loafing** (Latané, 1981).

Bibb Latané, Kip Williams, and Stephen Harkins (1979) examined both coordination losses and social loafing by arranging for students to cheer or clap either alone or in groups of varying sizes. The students cheered alone or in 2- or 6-person groups, or they were lead to believe they were in 2- or 6-person groups (those in the "pseudo-groups" wore blindfolds and headsets that played masking sound). Groups generated more noise than solitary subjects, but the productivity dropped as the groups became larger in size. In dyads, each subject worked at only 66% of capacity, and in 6-person groups at 36%. Productivity also dropped when subjects merely believed they were in groups. If subjects thought that one other person was shouting with them, they shouted 82% as intensely, and if they thought five other people were shouting, they reached only 74% of their capacity. These losses in productivity were not due to coordination problems; this decline in production could be attributed only to a reduction in effort—to social loafing (Latané et al., 1979, Experiment 2).

TEAMWORK

Social loafing is not a rare phenomenon. When sales personnel work in groups with shared goals, they tend to "take it easy" if another salesperson is nearby who can do their work (George, 1992). People who are trying to generate new, creative ideas in group brainstorming sessions usually put in less effort and are thus less productive than people who are generating new ideas individually (Paulus & Brown, 2007). Students assigned group projects often complain of inequity in the quality and quantity of each member's contributions: Some people just don't work as much as they should to help the

group reach its learning goals (Neu, 2012). People carrying out all sorts of physical and mental tasks expend less effort when working in groups, and the larger the group, the more they loaf (Karau & Williams, 1993).

Groups can, however, overcome this impediment to performance through **teamwork**. A group may include many talented individuals, but they must learn how to pool their individual abilities and energies to maximize the team's performance. Team goals must be set, work patterns structured, and a sense of group identity developed. Individual members must learn how to coordinate their actions, and any strains and stresses in interpersonal relations need to be identified and resolved (Salas et al., 2009).

Social loafing can be a problem. One way to overcome it is by recognizing that each group member has an important part to play in the success of the group and engaging in teamwork. (Credit: Marc Dalmulder/Dragon Boat Races/CC BY 2.0)

Researchers have identified two key ingredients to effective teamwork: a shared mental representation of the task and group cohesion. Teams improve their performance over time as they develop a shared understanding of the team and the tasks they are attempting. Some semblance of this **shared mental model,** is present nearly from its inception, but as the team practices, differences among the members in terms of their understanding of their situation and their team diminish as a

consensus becomes implicitly accepted (Tindale et al., 2008). Effective teams are also, in most cases, cohesive groups (Dion, 2000). **Group cohesion** is the integrity, solidarity, social integration, or unity of a group. In most cases, members of cohesive groups like each other and the group and they also are united in their pursuit of collective, group-level goals. Members tend to enjoy their groups more when they are cohesive, and cohesive groups usually outperform ones that lack cohesion. This cohesion-performance relationship, however, is a complex one. Meta-analytic studies suggest that cohesion improves teamwork among members, but that performance quality influences cohesion more than cohesion influences performance (Mullen & Copper, 1994; Mullen et al., 1998). Cohesive groups also can be spectacularly unproductive if the group's norms stress low productivity rather than high productivity (Seashore, 1954). Group cohesion will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

GROUP DEVELOPMENT

From the time they are formed, groups evolve and can go through a variety of changes over the course of their life cycles. Researchers have sought to identify common patterns in group development. These are referred to as **descriptive models** (Beebe & Masterson, 2015). Descriptive models can help us make sense of our group experiences by describing what might be 'normal' or 'typical' group processes. In the following sections, we will discuss two examples of descriptive models of group development — Tuckman's model and punctuated equilibrium.

TUCKMAN MODEL OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

American organizational psychologist Bruce Tuckman presented a robust model in 1965 that is still widely used today. Based on his observations of group behavior in a variety of settings, he proposed a four-stage map of group evolution, also known as **Tuckman's model of group development** (Tuckman, 1965). Later he enhanced the model by adding a fifth and final stage, the adjourning phase. Interestingly enough, just as an individual moves through developmental stages such as childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, so does a group, although in a much shorter period of time. According to this theory, in order to successfully facilitate a group, the leader needs to move through various leadership styles over time. Generally, this is accomplished by first being more directive, eventually serving as a coach, and later, once the group is able to assume more power and responsibility for itself, shifting to a delegator. While research has not confirmed that this is descriptive of how groups progress, knowing and following these steps can help groups be more effective. For example, groups that do not go through the storming phase early on will often return to this stage toward the end of the group process to address unresolved issues. Another example of the validity of the group development model involves groups that take the time to get to know each other socially in the forming stage. When this occurs, groups tend to handle future challenges better because the individuals have an understanding of each other's needs.

***Figure 1**: Tuckman's Model of Group Development*

Forming

In the **forming stage**, the group comes together for the first time. The members may already know each other or they may be total strangers. In either case, there is a level of formality, some anxiety, and a degree of guardedness as group members are not sure what is going to happen next. "Will I be accepted? What will my role be? Who has the power here?" These are some of the questions participants think about during this stage of group formation. Because of the large amount of uncertainty, members tend to be polite, conflict avoidant, and observant. They are trying to figure out the "rules of the game" without being too vulnerable. At this point, they may also be quite excited and optimistic about the task at hand, perhaps experiencing a level of pride at being chosen to join a particular group. Group members are trying to achieve several goals at this stage, although this may not necessarily be done consciously. First, they are trying to get to know each other. Often this can be accomplished by finding some common ground. Members also begin to explore group boundaries to determine what will be considered acceptable behavior. "Can I interrupt? Can I leave when I feel like it?" This trial phase may also involve testing the appointed leader or seeing if a leader emerges from the group. At this point, group members are also discovering how the group will work in terms of what needs to be done and who will be responsible for each task. This stage is often characterized by abstract discussions about issues to be addressed by the group; those who like to get moving can become impatient with this part of the process. This phase is usually short in duration, perhaps a meeting or two.

Storming

Once group members feel sufficiently safe and included, they tend to enter the **storming phase.** Participants focus less on keeping their guard up as they shed social facades, becoming more authentic and more argumentative. Group members begin to explore their power and influence, and they often stake out their territory by differentiating themselves from the other group members rather than seeking common ground. Discussions can become heated as participants raise contending points of view and values, or argue over how tasks should be done and who is assigned to them. It is not unusual for group members to become defensive, competitive, or jealous. They may even take sides or begin to form cliques within the group. Questioning and resisting direction from the leader is also quite common. "Why should I have to do this? Who designed this project in the first place? Why do I have to listen to you?" Although little seems to get accomplished at this stage, group members are becoming more authentic as they express their deeper thoughts and feelings. What they are really exploring is "Can I truly be me, have power, and be accepted?" During this chaotic stage, a great deal of creative energy that was previously buried is released and available for use, but it takes skill to move the group from storming to norming. In many cases, the group gets stuck in the storming phase.

AVOID GETTING STUCK IN THE STORMING PHASE

There are several steps you can take to avoid getting stuck in the storming phase of group development. Try the following if you feel the group process you are involved in is not progressing:

- *Normalize conflict*. Let members know this is a natural phase in the group-formation process.
- *Be inclusive*. Continue to make all members feel included and invite all views into the room. Mention how diverse ideas and opinions help foster creativity and innovation.
- *Make sure everyone is heard*. Facilitate heated discussions and help participants understand each other.
- *Support all group members*. This is especially important for those who feel more insecure.
- *Remain positive*. This is a key point to remember about the group's ability to accomplish its goal.
- *Don't rush the group's development*. Remember that working through the storming stage can take several meetings.

Once group members discover that they can be authentic and that the group is capable of handling differences without dissolving, they are ready to enter the next stage, norming.

Norming

"We survived!" is the common sentiment at the **norming stage**. Group members often feel elated at this point, and they are much more committed to each other and the group's goal. Feeling energized by knowing they can handle the "tough stuff," group members are now ready to get to work. Finding themselves more cohesive and cooperative, participants find it easy to establish their own ground rules (or *norms*) and define their operating procedures and goals. The group tends to make big decisions, while subgroups or individuals handle the smaller decisions. Hopefully, at this point, the group is more open and respectful toward each other, and members ask each other for both help and feedback. They may even begin to form friendships and share more personal information with each other. At this point, the leader should become more of a facilitator by stepping back and letting the group assume more responsibility for its goal. Since the group's energy is running high, this is an ideal time to host a social or team-building event.

Performing

Galvanized by a sense of shared vision and a feeling of unity, the group is ready to go into high gear. Members are more interdependent, individuality and differences are respected, and group members feel themselves to be part of a greater entity. At the **performing stage**, participants are not only getting the work done, but they also pay greater attention to *how* they are doing it. They ask questions like, "Do our operating procedures best support productivity and quality assurance? Do we have suitable means for addressing differences that arise so we can preempt destructive conflicts? Are we relating to and communicating with each other in ways that enhance group dynamics and help us

achieve our goals? How can I further develop as a person to become more effective?" By now, the group has matured, becoming more competent, autonomous, and insightful. Group leaders can finally move into coaching roles and help members grow in skill and leadership.

Adjourning

Just as groups form, so do they end. For example, many groups or teams formed in a business context are project-oriented and therefore are temporary in nature. Alternatively, a working group may dissolve due to organizational restructuring. Just as when we graduate from school or leave home for the first time, these endings can be bittersweet, with group members feeling a combination of victory, grief, and insecurity about what is coming next. For those who like routine and bond closely with fellow group members, this transition can be particularly challenging. Group leaders and members alike should be sensitive to handling these endings respectfully and compassionately. An ideal way to close a group is to set aside time to debrief ("How did it all go? What did we learn?"), acknowledge each other, and celebrate a job well done.

THE PUNCTUATED-EQUILIBRIUM MODEL

As you may have noted, the five-stage model we have just reviewed is a linear process. According to the model, a group progresses to the performing stage, at which point it finds itself in an ongoing, smooth-sailing situation until the group dissolves. In reality, subsequent researchers, most notably Joy H. Karriker, have found that the life of a group is much more dynamic and cyclical in nature (Karriker, 2005). For example, a group may operate in the performing stage for several months. Then, because of a disruption, such as a competing emerging technology that changes the rules of the game or the introduction of a new CEO, the group may move back into the storming phase before returning to performing. Ideally, any regression in the linear group progression will ultimately result in a higher level of functioning. Proponents of this cyclical model draw from behavioral scientist Connie Gersick's study of **punctuated equilibrium** (Gersick, 1991).

The concept of punctuated equilibrium was first proposed in 1972 by paleontologists Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould, who both believed that evolution occurred in rapid, radical spurts rather than gradually over time. Identifying numerous examples of this pattern in social behavior, Gersick found that the concept applied to organizational change. She proposed that groups remain fairly static, maintaining a certain equilibrium for long periods of time. Change during these periods is incremental, largely due to the resistance to change that arises when systems take root and processes become institutionalized. In this model, revolutionary change occurs in brief, punctuated bursts, generally catalyzed by a crisis or problem that breaks through the systemic inertia and shakes up the deep organizational structures in place. At this point, the organization or group has the opportunity to learn and create new structures that are better aligned with current realities. Whether the group does this is not guaranteed. In sum, in Gersick's model, groups can repeatedly cycle through the storming and performing stages, with revolutionary change taking place during short transitional windows. For organizations and groups who understand that disruption, conflict, and chaos are inevitable in the life of a social system, these disruptions represent opportunities for innovation and creativity.

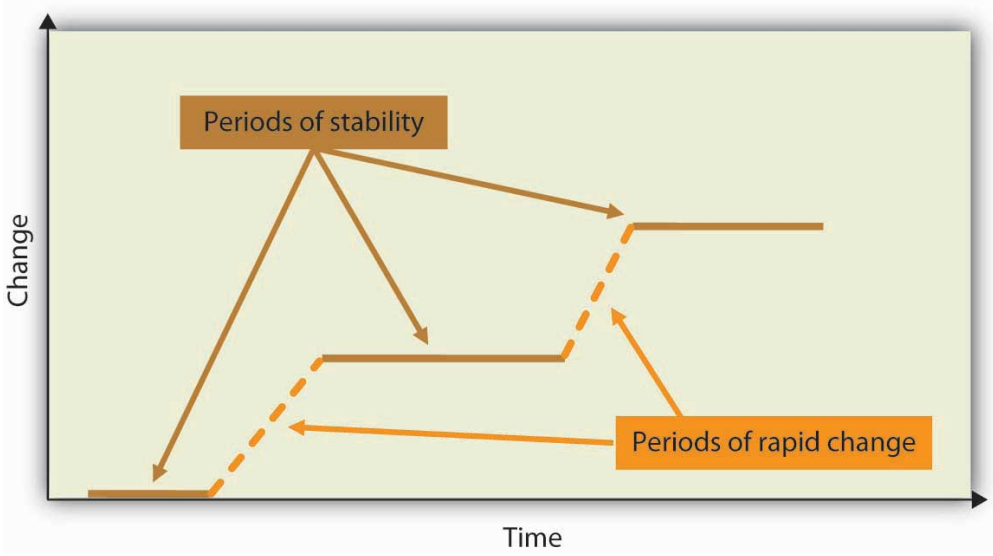

***Figure 2**: The Punctuated Equilibrium Model*

Review & Reflection Questions

- Why do people often join groups? What are some reasons you have joined groups in the past?
- Do people perform more effectively when alone or when part of a group? Under what conditions?
- If you were a college professor, what would you do to increase the success of in-class groups and teams?
- What do descriptive models do for us? How might they be useful to groups?
- Have you observed a group going through these phases in the past? What can you learn from those experiences?

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The sections "The Psychological Significance of Groups" and "Motivation and Performance" are adapted and condensed from: Forsyth, D. R. (2019). The psychology of groups. In R. Biswas-Diener & E. Diener (Eds.), *Noba textbook series: Psychology.* DEF publishers. nobaproject.com. This content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

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CHAPTER 3.

IDENTIFYING GROUP ROLES

Learning Objectives

- Identify and discuss task-related group roles and behaviors
- Identify and discuss maintenance group roles and behaviors
- Identify and discuss negative group roles and behaviors

Group roles, or the expected behaviors or functions of group members, can be formal or informal and played by more than one group member. Additionally, one group member may exhibit various role behaviors within a single group meeting or play a few consistent roles over the course of his or her involvement with a group. Some people's role behaviors result from their personality traits, while other people act out a certain role because of a short-term mood, as a reaction to another group member, or out of necessity. Group communication scholars have cautioned us to not always think of these roles as neatly bounded all-inclusive categories. After all, we all play multiple roles within a group and must draw on multiple communication behaviors to successfully play them. When someone continually exhibits a particular behavior, it may be labeled as a role, but even isolated behaviors can impact group functioning.

In this chapter, we will discuss the three categories of common group roles that were identified by early group communication scholars. These role categories include task-related roles, maintenance roles, and negative roles that are considered to be self-centered or unproductive for the group (Benne & Sheats, 1948).

TASK-RELATED ROLES AND BEHAVIORS

Task roles and their related behaviors contribute directly to the group's completion of a task or achievement of its goal or purpose. Task-related roles typically serve leadership, informational, or procedural functions. In this section, we will discuss the following roles and behaviors: task leader, expediter, information provider, information seeker, gatekeeper, and recorder.

TASK LEADER

Within any group, there may be a **task leader** who has a high group status because of his or her maturity, problem-solving abilities, knowledge, and/or leadership experience and skills and functions primarily to help the group complete its task (Cragan & Wright, 1991). This person may be a designated or emergent leader, but in either case, task leaders tend to talk more during group interactions than other group members and also tend to do more work in the group. Depending on the number of tasks a group has, there may be more than one task leader, especially if the tasks require different sets of skills or knowledge. Because of the added responsibilities of being a task leader, people in these roles may experience higher levels of stress. A task leader's stresses, however, may be lessened through some of the maintenance role behaviors that we will discuss later.

Task-leader behaviors can be further divided into two types: substantive and procedural (Pavitt, 1999). The **substantive leader** is the "idea person" who communicates "big picture" thoughts and suggestions that feed group discussion. The **procedural leader** is the person who gives the most guidance, perhaps following up on the ideas generated by the substantive leader. A skilled and experienced task leader may be able to perform both of these roles, but when the roles are filled by two different people, the person considered the procedural leader is more likely than the substantive leader to be viewed by members as the overall group leader. This indicates that task-focused groups assign more status to the person who actually guides the group toward the completion of the task (a "doer") than the person who comes up with ideas (the "thinker").

EXPEDITER

The **expediter** is a task-related role that functions to keep the group on track toward completing its task by managing the agenda and setting and assessing goals to monitor the group's progress. An expediter doesn't push group members mindlessly along toward the completion of their task; an expediter must have a good sense of when a topic has been sufficiently discussed or when a group's extended focus on one area has led to diminishing returns. In such cases, the expediter may say, "Now that we've had a thorough discussion of the pros and cons of switching the office from PCs to Macs, which side do you think has more support?" or "We've spent half of this meeting looking for examples of what other libraries have done and haven't found anything useful. Maybe we should switch gears so we can get something concrete done tonight."

An expediter in a restaurant keeps the food flowing from the kitchen to the diners in a timely and orderly fashion, just as the expediter in a group keeps the group on an agenda. (Credit: Lester Guijarro/chefs/CC BY-SA 2.0)

If you've ever worked in a restaurant, you're probably familiar with an expediter's role in the kitchen. The person working "expo" helps make sure that the timing on all the dishes for a meal works out and that each plate is correct before it goes out to the table. This is by no means an easy job since some entrées cook quicker than others and not everyone orders their burger the same way. So the expediter helps make order out of chaos by calling the food out to the kitchen in a particular order that logically works so that all the food will come up at the same time. Once the food is up, he or she also checks what's on the plate against what's on the ticket to make sure it matches. Expediting in a restaurant and a small group is like a dance that requires some flexible and creative thinking and an ability to stick to a time frame and assess progress. To avoid the perception that group members are being rushed, a skilled expediter can demonstrate good active-listening skills by paraphrasing what has been discussed and summarizing what has been accomplished in such a way that makes it easier for group members to see the need to move on.

INFORMATION PROVIDER

The role of **information provider** includes behaviors that are more evenly shared than in other roles, as ideally, all group members present new ideas, initiate discussions of new topics, and contribute their own relevant knowledge and experiences. When group members are brought together because they each have different types of information, early group meetings may consist of group members taking turns briefing each other on their area of expertise. In other situations, only one person in the group may be chosen because of his or her specialized knowledge and this person may be expected to be the primary information provider for all other group members. For example, I was asked to serve on a university committee that is reviewing our undergraduate learning goals. Since my official role is to serve as the "faculty expert" on the subcommittee related to speaking, I played a more

central information-provider function for our group during most of our initial meetings. Since other people on the subcommittee weren't as familiar with speaking and its place within higher education curriculum, it made sense that information-providing behaviors were not as evenly distributed in this case.

INFORMATION SEEKER

The **information seeker** asks for more information, elaboration, or clarification on items relevant to the group's task. The information sought may include factual information or group member opinions. In general, information seekers ask questions for clarification, but they can also ask questions that help provide an important evaluative function. Most groups could benefit from more critically oriented information-seeking behaviors. Critical questioning helps increase the quality of ideas and group outcomes and helps avoid groupthink. By asking for more information, people have to defend (in a nonadversarial way) and/or support their claims, which can help ensure that the information being discussed is credible, relevant, and thoroughly considered. When information seeking or questioning occurs as a result of poor listening skills, it risks negatively impacting the group. Skilled information providers and seekers are also good active listeners. They increase all group members' knowledge when they paraphrase and ask clarifying questions about the information presented.

GATEKEEPER

The **gatekeeper** manages the flow of conversation in a group to achieve an appropriate balance so that all group members get to participate in a meaningful way. The gatekeeper may prompt others to provide information by saying something like "Let's each share one idea we have for a movie to show during Black History Month." He or she may also help correct an imbalance between members who have provided much information already and members who have been quiet by saying something like "Aretha, we've heard a lot from you today. Let's hear from someone else. Beau, what are your thoughts on Aretha's suggestion?" Gatekeepers should be cautious about "calling people out" or at least making them feel that way. Instead of scolding someone for not participating, they should be invitational and ask a member to contribute to something specific instead of just asking if they have anything to add. Since gatekeepers make group members feel included, they also service the relational aspects of the group.

RECORDER

The **recorder** takes notes on the discussion and activities that occur during a group meeting. The recorder is the only role that is essentially limited to one person at a time since in most cases it wouldn't be necessary or beneficial to have more than one person recording. At less formal meetings there may be no recorder, while at formal meetings there is almost always a person who records meeting minutes, which are an overview of what occurred at the meeting. Each committee will have different rules or norms regarding the level of detail within and availability of the minutes. While some group's minutes are required by law to be public, others may be strictly confidential. Even though a record of a group meeting may be valuable, the role of the recorder is often regarded as a low-status position, since the person in the role may feel or be viewed as subservient to the other

members who can more actively contribute to the group's functioning. Because of this, it may be desirable to have the role of the recorder rotate among members (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

The recorder writes and/or types notes during group meetings to document the discussion and other interactions. (Credit: Chung Ho Leung/Note Taking/CC BY-ND 2.0)

MAINTENANCE ROLES AND BEHAVIORS

Maintenance roles and their corresponding behaviors function to create and maintain social cohesion and fulfill the interpersonal needs of group members. All these role behaviors require strong and sensitive interpersonal skills. The maintenance roles we will discuss in this section include social-emotional leader, supporter, tension releaser, harmonizer, and interpreter.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEADER

The **social-emotional leader** within a group may perform a variety of maintenance roles and is generally someone who is well-liked by the other group members and whose role behaviors complement but don't compete with the task leader. The social-emotional leader may also reassure and support the task leader when he or she becomes stressed. In general, the social-emotional leader is a reflective thinker who has good perception skills that he or she uses to analyze the group dynamics and climate and then initiate the appropriate role behaviors to maintain a positive climate. Unlike the role of task leader, this isn't a role that typically shifts from one person to another. While all members of the group perform some maintenance role behaviors at various times, the social-emotional leader reliably functions to support group members and maintain a positive relational climate. Social-emotional leadership functions can actually become detrimental to the group and lead to less satisfaction among members when the maintenance behaviors being performed are seen as redundant or as too distracting from the task (Pavitt, 1999).

SUPPORTER

The role of **supporter** is characterized by communication behaviors that encourage other group members and provide emotional support as needed. The supporter's work primarily occurs in one-on-one exchanges that are more intimate and in-depth than the exchanges that take place during full group meetings. While many group members may make supporting comments publicly at group meetings, these comments are typically superficial and/or brief. A supporter uses active empathetic listening skills to connect with group members who may seem down or frustrated by saying something like "Tayesha, you seemed kind of down today. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?" Supporters also follow up on previous conversations with group members to maintain the connections they've already established by saying things like "Alan, I remember you said your mom is having surgery this weekend. I hope it goes well. Let me know if you need anything." The supporter's communication behaviors are probably the least noticeable of any of the other maintenance roles, which may make this group member's efforts seem overlooked. Leaders and other group members can help support the supporter by acknowledging his or her contributions.

TENSION RELEASER

The **tension releaser** is someone who is naturally funny and sensitive to the personalities of the group and the dynamics of any given situation and who uses these qualities to manage the frustration level of the group. Being funny is not enough to fulfill this role, as jokes or comments could indeed be humorous to other group members but be delivered at an inopportune time, which ultimately creates rather than releases tension. The healthy use of humor by the tension releaser performs the same maintenance function as the empathy employed by the harmonizer or the social-emotional leader, but it is less intimate and is typically directed toward the whole group instead of just one person. The tension releaser may start serving his or her function during the forming stage of group development when primary tensions are present due to the typical uncertainties present during initial interactions. The tension releaser may help "break the ice" or make others feel at ease during the group's more socially awkward first meetings. When people make a failed attempt to release tension, they may be viewed as a joker, which is a self-interested role we will learn more about later.

HARMONIZER

The **harmonizer** role is played by group members who help manage the various types of group conflict that emerge during group communication. They keep their eyes and ears open for signs of conflict among group members and ideally intervene before it escalates. For example, the harmonizer may sense that one group member's critique of another member's idea wasn't received positively, and he or she may be able to rephrase the critique in a more constructive way, which can help diminish the other group member's defensiveness. Harmonizers also deescalate conflict once it has already started—for example, by suggesting that the group take a break and then mediating between group members in a side conversation. These actions can help prevent conflict from spilling over into other group interactions. In cases where the whole group experiences conflict, the harmonizer may help lead the group in perception-checking discussions that help members see an issue from multiple perspectives. For harmonizers to be effective, it's important that they be viewed as impartial and committed to the group as a whole rather than to one side of an issue or one person or faction within

the larger group. A special kind of harmonizer that helps manage cultural differences within the group is the interpreter.

An interpreter is a group member who has cultural sensitivity and experience interacting with multiple cultures and can help facilitate intercultural interactions within a group. (Credit: Laura/Estrenando cabina/CC BY 2.0)

INTERPRETER

An **interpreter** helps manage the diversity within a group by mediating intercultural conflict, articulating common ground between different people, and generally creating a climate where difference is seen as an opportunity rather than as something to be feared. Just as an interpreter at the United Nations acts as a bridge between two different languages, the interpreter can bridge identity differences between group members. Interpreters can help perform the other maintenance roles discussed with a special awareness of and sensitivity toward cultural differences. While a literal interpreter would serve a task-related function within a group, this type of interpreter may help support a person who feels left out of the group because he or she has a different cultural identity than the majority of the group. Interpreters often act as allies to people who are different even though the interpreter doesn't share the specific cultural identity. The interpreter may help manage conflict that arises as a result of diversity, in this case, acting as an ambassador or mediator. Interpreters, because of their cultural sensitivity, may also take a proactive role to help address conflict before it emerges—for example, by taking a group member aside and explaining why his or her behavior or comments may be perceived as offensive.

NEGATIVE ROLES AND BEHAVIORS

Group communication scholars began exploring the negative side of group member roles more than

sixty years ago (Benne & Sheats, 1948). Studying these **negative roles** can help us analyze group interactions and potentially better understand why some groups are more successful than others. It's important to acknowledge that we all perform some negative behaviors within groups but that those behaviors do not necessarily constitute a role. A person may temporarily monopolize a discussion to bring attention to his or her idea. If that behavior gets the attention of the group members and makes them realize they were misinformed or headed in a negative direction, then that behavior may have been warranted. Negative behaviors can be enacted with varying degrees of intensity and regularity, and their effects may range from mild annoyance to group failure. In general, the effects grow increasingly negative as they increase in intensity and frequency. While a single enactment of a negative role behavior may still harm the group, regular enactment of such behaviors would constitute a role, and playing that role is guaranteed to negatively impact the group. We will divide our discussion of negative roles into self-centered and unproductive roles.

SELF-CENTERED ROLES

The behaviors associated with all the **self-centered roles** divert attention from the task to the group member exhibiting the behavior. Although all these roles share in their quest to divert attention, they do it in different ways and for different reasons. The self-centered roles we will discuss are the central negative, monopolizer, self-confessor, insecure compliment seeker, and joker (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

Central Negative

The **central negative** argues against most of the ideas and proposals discussed in the group and often emerges as a result of a leadership challenge during group formation. The failed attempt to lead the group can lead to feelings of resentment toward the leader and/or the purpose of the group, which then manifest in negative behaviors that delay, divert, or block the group's progress toward achieving its goal. This scenario is unfortunate because the central negative is typically a motivated and intelligent group member who can benefit the group if properly handled by the group leader or other members. Group communication scholars suggest that the group leader or leaders actively incorporate central negatives into group tasks and responsibilities to make them feel valued and to help diminish any residual anger, disappointment, or hurt feelings from the leadership conflict (Bormann & Bormann, 1988). Otherwise the central negative will continue to argue against the proposals and decisions of the group, even when they may be in agreement. In some cases, the central negative may unintentionally serve a beneficial function if his or her criticisms prevent groupthink.

Monopolizer

The **monopolizer** is a group member who makes excessive verbal contributions, preventing equal participation by other group members. In short, monopolizers like to hear the sound of their own voice and do not follow typical norms for conversational turn-taking. Some people are well-informed, charismatic, and competent communicators who can get away with impromptu lectures and long stories, but monopolizers do not possess the magnetic qualities of such people. A group member's excessive verbal contributions are more likely to be labeled as monopolizing when they are not related to the task or when they provide unnecessary or redundant elaboration. Some monopolizers do not intentionally speak for longer than they should. Instead, they think they are making a genuine

contribution to the group. These folks likely lack sensitivity to nonverbal cues, or they would see that other group members are tired of listening or annoyed. Other monopolizers just like to talk and don't care what others think. Some may be trying to make up for a lack of knowledge or experience. This type of monopolizer is best described as a dilettante, or an amateur who tries to pass himself or herself off as an expert.

There are some subgroups of behaviors that fall under the monopolizer's role. The "stage hog" monopolizes discussion with excessive verbal contributions and engages in one-upping and narcissistic listening. One-upping is a spotlight-stealing strategy in which people try to verbally "outdo" others by saying something like "You think that's bad? Listen to what happened to me!" They also listen to others to find something they can connect back to themselves, not to understand the message. The stage hog is like the diva that refuses to leave the stage to let the next performer begin. Unlike a monopolizer, who may engage in his or her behaviors unknowingly, stage hogs are usually aware of what they're doing.

A monopolizer makes excessive verbal contributions and holds the floor without allowing others to speak. (Credit: Kev-shine/ Business man point/CC BY 2.0).

The "egghead" monopolizes the discussion with excessive contributions that are based in actual knowledge but that exceed the level of understanding of other group members or the needs of the group (Cragan & Wright, 1999). The egghead is different from the dilettante monopolizer discussed earlier because this person has genuine knowledge and expertise on a subject, which may be useful to the group. But like the monopolizer and stage hog, the egghead's excessive contributions draw attention away from the task, slow the group down, and may contribute to a negative group climate. The egghead may be like an absentminded professor who is smart but lacks the social sensitivity to tell when he or she has said enough and is now starting to annoy other group members. This type of egghead naively believes that other group members care as much about the subject as he or she does. The second type of egghead is more pompous and monopolizes the discussion to flaunt his

or her intellectual superiority. While the first type of egghead may be tolerated to a point by the group and seen as eccentric but valuable, the second type of egghead is perceived more negatively and more quickly hurts the group. In general, the egghead's advanced knowledge of a subject and excessive contributions can hurt the group's potential for synergy, since other group members may defer to the egghead expert, which can diminish the creativity that comes from outside and non-expert perspectives.

Self-Confessor

The **self-confessor** is a group member who tries to use group meetings as therapy sessions for issues not related to the group's task. Self-confessors tend to make personal self-disclosures that are unnecessarily intimate. While it is reasonable to expect that someone experiencing a personal problem may want to consult with the group, especially if that person has formed close relationships with other group members, a self-confessor consistently comes to meetings with drama or a personal problem. A supporter or gatekeeper may be able to manage some degree of self-confessor behavior, but a chronic self-confessor is likely to build frustration among other group members that can lead to interpersonal conflict and a lack of cohesion and productivity. Most groups develop a norm regarding how much personal information is discussed during group meetings, and some limit such disclosures to the time before or after the meeting, which may help deter the self-confessor.

Insecure Compliment Seeker

The **insecure compliment seeker** wants to know that he or she is valued by the group and seeks recognition that is often not task related. For example, they don't want to be told they did a good job compiling a report; they want to know that they're a good person or attractive or smart—even though they might not be any of those things. In short, they try to get validation from their relationships with group members—validation that they may be lacking in relationships outside the group. Or they may be someone who continually seeks the approval of others or tries to overcompensate for insecurity through excessive behaviors aimed at eliciting compliments. For example, if a group member wears a tight-fitting t-shirt in hopes of drawing attention to his physique but doesn't receive any compliments from the group, he may say, "My girlfriend said she could tell I've been working out. What do you think?"

Joker

The **joker** is a person who consistently uses sarcasm, plays pranks, or tells jokes, which distracts from the overall functioning of the group. In short, the joker is an incompetent tension releaser. Rather than being seen as the witty group member with good timing, the joker is seen as the "class clown." Like the insecure compliment seeker, the joker usually seeks attention and approval because of an underlying insecurity. A group's leader may have to intervene and privately meet with a person engaging in joker behavior to help prevent a toxic or unsafe climate from forming. This may be ineffective, though, if a joker's behaviors are targeted toward the group leader, which could indicate that the joker has a general problem with authority. In the worst-case scenario, a joker may have to be expelled from the group if his or her behavior becomes violent, offensive, illegal, or otherwise unethical.

UNPRODUCTIVE ROLES

There are some negative roles in group communication that do not primarily function to divert attention away from the group's task to a specific group member. Instead, these **unproductive roles** just prevent or make it more difficult for the group to make progress. These roles include the blocker, withdrawer, aggressor, and doormat.

Blocker

The **blocker** intentionally or unintentionally keeps things from getting done in the group. Intentionally, a person may suggest that the group look into a matter further or explore another option before making a final decision even though the group has already thoroughly considered the matter. They may cite a procedural rule or suggest that input be sought from additional people to delay progress. Behaviors that lead to more information gathering can be good for the group, but when they are unnecessary they are blocking behaviors. Unintentionally, a group member may set blocking behaviors into motion by missing a meeting or not getting his or her work done on time. People can also block progress by playing the 'airhead' role, which is the opposite of the egghead role discussed earlier. An 'airhead' skirts his or her responsibilities by claiming ignorance when he or she actually understands or intentionally performs poorly on a task so the other group members question his or her intellectual abilities to handle other tasks (Cragan & Wright, 1999). Since exhibiting airhead behaviors gets a person out of performing tasks, they can also be a tactic of a withdrawer, which we will discuss next.

Social Loafer

A **social loafer**, also known as a withdrawer, mentally and/or physically removes herself or himself from group activities and only participates when forced to. When groups exceed five members, the likelihood of having a member exhibit social loafing behaviors increases. For example, a member may attend meetings and seemingly pay attention but not contribute to discussions or not volunteer to take on tasks, instead waiting on other members to volunteer first. Social loafers often make other group members dread group work. A member may also avoid eye contact with other group members, sit apart from the group, or orient his or her body away from the group to avoid participation. Social loafers generally do not exhibit active listening behaviors. At the extreme, a group member may stop attending group meetings completely. Adopting a problem-solving model that requires equal participation, starting to build social cohesion early, and choosing a meeting space and seating arrangement that encourages interactivity can help minimize withdrawing behaviors. Gatekeepers, supporters, and group leaders can also intervene after early signs of withdrawing to try to reengage the group member.

Aggressor

An **aggressor** exhibits negative behaviors such as putting others' ideas down, attacking others personally when they feel confronted or insecure, competing unnecessarily to "win" at the expense of others within the group, and being outspoken to the point of distraction. An aggressor's behaviors can quickly cross the fine line between being abrasive or dominant and being unethical. For example, a person vigorously defending a position that is relevant and valid is different from a person who

claims others' ideas are stupid but has nothing to contribute. As with most behaviors, the aggressors fall into a continuum based on their intensity. On the more benign end of the continuum is assertive behavior, toward the middle is aggressive behavior, and on the unethical side is bullying behavior. At their worst, an aggressor's behaviors can lead to shouting matches or even physical violence within a group. Establishing group rules and norms that set up a safe climate for discussion and include mechanisms for temporarily or permanently removing a group member who violates that safe space may proactively prevent such behaviors.

Doormat

While we all need to take one for the team sometimes or compromise for the sake of the group, the **doormat** is a person who is chronically submissive to the point that it hurts the group's progress (Cragan & Wright, 1999). Doormat behaviors include quickly giving in when challenged, self-criticism, and claims of inadequacy. Some people who exhibit doormat behaviors may have difficulty being self-assured and assertive, may be conflict-avoidant, or may even feel that their behaviors will make other group members like them. Other people play the martyr and make sure to publicly note their "sacrifices" for the group, hoping to elicit praise or attention. If their sacrifices aren't recognized, they may engage in further negative behaviors such as whining and/or insecure compliment seeking.

Review & Reflection Questions

- Which of the task-related roles do you think has the greatest potential of going wrong and causing conflict within the group and why?
- Which maintenance role do you think you've performed the best in previous group experiences? How did your communication and behaviors help you perform the role's functions? Which maintenance role have you had the most difficulty or least interest in performing? Why?
- Describe a situation in which you have witnessed a person playing one of the self-centered roles in a group. How did the person communicate? What were the effects? Now describe a situation in which you have witnessed a person playing one of the unproductive roles in a group. How did the person communicate? What were the effects?

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The chapter is adapted from "Group Member Roles" in *Communication in the Real World* from the University of Minnesota. The book was adapted from a work produced and distributed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA) by a publisher who has requested that they and the original author not receive attribution. This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

CHAPTER 4.

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING GROUP NORMS

Learning Objectives

- Define norms
- Describe the characteristics and functions of norms within groups and teams
- Describe the process of group member socialization
- Discuss why someone might conform to or resist group norms

Every group in which we participate has a set of norms, or ground rules for how group members should act or behave. Each group's rules and norms are different, and we must learn them to be effective participants. Some groups formalize their norms and rules, while others are less formal and more fluid. Norms are the recognized rules of behavior for group members. Norms influence the ways we communicate with other members, and ultimately, the outcome of group participation. Norms are important because, as we highlighted in the "norming" stage of group development, they are the defining characteristics of groups. In this chapter, we will highlight several of the essential aspects of norms and how they relate to people in groups or teams. We will also consider the characteristics and functions of group norms, the process of learning group norms, as well as conformity with and deviance from them.

DEFINING NORMS IN GROUPS

Because people in groups come together for a specific purpose, they develop shared norms to help them achieve their goals. Even with a goal in place, random interaction does not define a group. Group interaction is generally guided by norms a group has established for acceptable behavior. **Norms** are essentially expectations of the group members, established by the group, and can be conscious and formal, or unconscious and informal. A couple of examples of group norms include the expectation that all members show up at group meeting times, the expectation that all group members focus on the group instead of personal matters (for example, turning cell phones and other distractions off), and the expectation that group members finish their part of the work by the

established due date. When members of the group violate group norms, other members of the group get frustrated and the group's overall goal may be affected.

An example of a norm could be to not to be on your phone during meetings. (Credit: Alex Ware/Unsplash)

Brilhart and Galanes (1998) divide norms into two categories. **General norms** "direct the behavior of the group as a whole" (130). Meeting times, how meetings run, and the division of tasks are all examples of general norms that groups form and maintain. These norms establish the generally accepted rules of behavior for all group members. The second category of norms is role-specific norms. **Role-specific norms** "concern individual members with particular roles, such as the designated leader" (130). Not only are there norms that apply to all members of a group, but there are also norms that influence the behaviors of each role. When norms are violated, group members most often will work to correct the violation to get the group back on task and functioning properly. Have you ever been in a group in which a particular group member did not do the task that was assigned to them? What happened? How did the group handle this situation as a whole? What was the response of the person who did not complete the task? In hindsight, would you have handled it differently? If so, how?

CHARACTERISTICS OF GROUP NORMS

A **work group norm** may be defined as a standard that is shared by group members and regulates member behavior within a group or organization. An example can be seen in a typical classroom situation when students develop a norm against speaking up in class too often. It is believed that students who are highly visible improve their grades at the expense of others. Hence, a norm is created that attempts to govern acceptable classroom behavior. We see similar examples in the workplace. There may be a norm against producing too much or too little, against getting too close to the

supervisor, against being late for work, and so forth. According to Hackman (1996), workgroup norms may be characterized by at least five factors:

1. *Norms summarize and simplify group influence processes.* They denote the processes by which groups regulate and regularize member behavior.
2. *Norms apply only to behavior, not to private thoughts and feelings.* Although norms may be based on thoughts and feelings, they cannot govern them. That is, private acceptance of group norms is unnecessary—only public compliance is needed.
3. *Norms are generally developed only for behaviors that are viewed as important by most group members.*
4. *Norms usually develop gradually, but the process can be quickened if members wish.* Norms usually are developed by group members as the need arises, such as when a situation occurs that requires new ground rules for members to protect group integrity.
5. *All norms do not apply to all members.* Some norms, for example, apply only to young initiates (such as getting the coffee), whereas others are based on seniority, sex, race, or economic class.

FUNCTIONS OF GROUP NORMS

Most all groups have norms, although some may be more extensive than others. To see this, examine the norms that exist in the various groups to which you belong. Which groups have more fully developed norms? Why? What functions do these norms serve? Several efforts have been made to answer this question. In general, workgroup norms serve four functions in organizational settings (Feldman, 1984):

1. *Norms facilitate group survival*. When a group is under threat, norms provide a basis for ensuring goal-directed behavior and rejecting deviant behavior that is not purposeful to the group. This is essentially a "circle the wagons" phenomenon.
2. *Norms simplify expected behaviors.* Norms tell group members what is expected of them—what is acceptable and unacceptable—and allow members to anticipate the behaviors of their fellow group members and to anticipate the positive or negative consequences of their own behavior.
3. *Norms help avoid embarrassing situations*. By identifying acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, norms tell group members when a behavior or topic is damaging to another member. For example, a norm against swearing signals group members that such action would be hurtful to someone in the group and should be avoided.
4. *Norms help identify the group and express its central values to others.* Norms concerning clothes, language, mannerisms, and so forth help tell others who belongs to the group and, in some cases, what the group stands for. Norms often serve as rallying points for group members.

SOCIALIZING GROUP MEMBERS

Group socialization refers to the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors. Group norms and rules can only be created and maintained through socialization (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). The need for socialization also changes throughout a group's life span. If membership in a group is stable, long-term members should

not need much socialization. However, when new members join a group, existing members must take time to engage in socialization. When a totally new group is formed, socialization will be an ongoing process as group members negotiate rules and procedures, develop norms, and create a shared history over time.

The information exchanged during socialization can be broken down into two general categories: technical and social knowledge (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). **Technical knowledge** focuses on skills and information needed to complete a task, and **social knowledge** focuses on behavioral norms that guide interaction. Each type of information is usually conveyed through a combination of formal and informal means. Technical knowledge can be fairly easily passed along through orientations, trainings, manuals, and documents because this content is often fairly straightforward. Social knowledge is more ambiguous and is usually conveyed through informal means or passively learned by new members through observation. Technical knowledge relates more to group rules and social knowledge relates more to group norms.

Organizations and groups socialize new members in different ways. A new training cohort at an established company may be given technical rule-based information in the form of a manual and history of the organization and an overview of the organizational culture to help convey social knowledge about group norms. Members of some small groups like fraternities or professional organizations have to take pledges or oaths that may convey a mixture of technical and social knowledge. Social knowledge may be conveyed in interactions that are separate from official group time. For example, literally socializing as a group is a good way to socialize group members. Many large and successful businesses encourage small groups within the company to socialize outside of work time to build cohesion and group solidarity.

Social knowledge is often shared in more informal meetings or socializing. (Credit: LinkedIn Sales Navigator/Coffee meeting/Unsplash)

Socialization continues after initial membership through the enforcement of rules and norms. When someone deviates from the rules and norms and is corrected, it serves as a reminder for all other members and performs a follow-up socializing function. Since rules are explicitly stated and documented, deviation from the rules can have consequences ranging from verbal warnings, to temporary or permanent separation from the group, to fines or other sanctions. And although norms are implicit, deviating from them can still have consequences. Even though someone may not actually verbally correct the deviation, the self-consciousness, embarrassment, or awkwardness that can result from such deviations is often enough to initiate corrective actions. Group norms can be so implicit that they are taken for granted and operate under group members' awareness.

Group rules and norms provide members with a sense of predictability that helps reduce uncertainty and increase a sense of security for one's place within the group. They also guide group members' involvement with the group, help create a shared social reality, and allow the group to function in particular ways without having actual people constantly educating, monitoring, and then correcting member behaviors (Hargie, 2011). Of course, the degree to which this is successful depends on the buy-in from group members.

PRESSURE TO CONFORM

There must be some kind of motivating force present within groups for the rules and norms to help govern and guide a group. Without such pressure, group members would have no incentive

to conform to group norms or buy into the group's identity and values. In this section, we will discuss how rules and norms gain their power through internal and external pressures and how these pressures can have positive and negative effects.

In general, some people are more likely to accept norms and rules than others, which can influence the interaction and potential for conflict within a group. While some people may feel a need for social acceptance that leads them to accept a norm or rule with minimal **conformity pressure,** others may actively resist because they have a valid disagreement or because they have an aggressive or argumentative personality (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Such personality traits are examples of internal pressures that operate within the individual group member and act as a self-governing mechanism. When group members discipline themselves and monitor their own behavior, groups need not invest in as many external mechanisms to promote conformity. Deviating from the group's rules and norms that a member internalized during socialization can lead to self-imposed feelings of guilt or shame that can then initiate corrective behaviors and discourage the member from going against the group.

External pressures in the form of group policies, rewards or punishments, or other forces outside of individual group members also exert conformity pressure. In terms of group policies, groups that have an official admission process may have a probation period during which new members' membership is contingent on them conforming to group expectations. Deviation from expectations during this "trial period" could lead to expulsion from the group. Supervisors, mentors, and other types of group leaders are also agents that can impose external pressures toward conformity. These group members often have the ability to provide positive or negative reinforcement in the form of praise or punishment, which are clear attempts to influence behavior.

Review & Reflection Questions

- Discuss the role of norms in groups. What functions do they serve?
- What are some examples of norms you have observed in previous groups? What norms might you want to adopt again in the future?
- Imagine a new member was added to your team today. What might it look like to socialize that person into the group?
- Is conformity to group norms always good? Why or why not?

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The introduction to "Definition of Norms" in this chapter is adapted from Chapter 10 "Groups Communication" from *Survey of Communication Study* by Laura K. Hawn and Scott T. Paynton. This content is available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License.

The sections "Characteristics of Group Norms" and "Functions of Group Norms" in this chapter were adapted from Black, J.S., & Bright, D.S. (2019). *Organizational behavior.* OpenStax. https://openstax.org/books/organizational-behavior/. Access the full chapter for free here. The content is available under a Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 license.

The sections "Socializing Group Members" and "Pressure to Conform" are adapted from "Small Group Dynamics" in the book *Communication in the Real World* from the University of Minnesota. The book is adapted from a work produced and distributed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA) by a publisher who has requested that they and the original author not receive attribution. This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

CHAPTER 5.

WORKING IN DIVERSE TEAMS

Learning Objectives

- Describe how diversity can enhance decision-making and problem-solving
- Identify challenges and best practices for working with multicultural teams
- Discuss divergent cultural characteristics and list several examples of such characteristics in the culture(s) you identify with

Decision-making and problem-solving can be much more dynamic and successful when performed in a diverse team environment. The multiple diverse perspectives can enhance both the understanding of the problem and the quality of the solution. Yet, working in diverse teams can be challenging given different identities, cultures, beliefs, and experiences. In this chapter, we will discuss the effects of team diversity on group decision-making and problem-solving, identify best practices and challenges for working in and with multicultural teams, and dig deeper into divergent cultural characteristics that teams may need to navigate.

DOES TEAM DIVERSITY ENHANCE DECISION MAKING AND PROBLEM SOLVING?

In the *Harvard Business Review* article "Why Diverse Teams are Smarter," David Rock and Heidi Grant (2016) support the idea that increasing workplace diversity is a good business decision. A 2015 McKinsey report on 366 public companies found that those in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity in management were 35% more likely to have financial returns above their industry mean, and those in the top quartile for gender diversity were 15% more likely to have returns above the industry mean. Similarly, in a global analysis conducted by Credit Suisse, organizations with at least one female board member yielded a higher return on equity and higher net income growth than those that did not have any women on the board.

Teams made up of diverse members tend to perform better than teams of similar backgrounds. Here, the Women of Color in Technology work on a project. The tech industry has been criticized for the lack of diversity among its ranks, and groups like the Women of Color in Technology are looking to change that. (Credit: WOC in Tech Chat/CC BY 2.0)

Additional research on diversity has shown that diverse teams are better at decision-making and problem-solving because they tend to focus more on facts, per the Rock and Grant article. A study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* showed that people from diverse backgrounds "might actually alter the behavior of a group's social majority in ways that lead to improved and more accurate group thinking." It turned out that in the study, the diverse panels raised more facts related to the case than homogeneous panels and made fewer factual errors while discussing available evidence. Another study noted in the article showed that diverse teams are "more likely to constantly reexamine facts and remain objective. They may also encourage greater scrutiny of each member's actions, keeping their joint cognitive resources sharp and vigilant. By breaking up workforce homogeneity, you can allow your employees to become more aware of their own potential biases—entrenched ways of thinking that can otherwise blind them to key information and even lead them to make errors in decision-making processes." In other words, when people are among homogeneous and like-minded (non-diverse) teammates, the team is susceptible to **groupthink** and may be reticent to think about opposing viewpoints since all team members are in alignment. In a more diverse team with a variety of backgrounds and experiences, the opposing viewpoints are more likely to come out and the team members feel obligated to research and address the questions that have been raised. Again, this enables a richer discussion and a more in-depth fact-finding and exploration of opposing ideas and viewpoints to solve problems.

Diversity in teams also leads to greater innovation. A Boston Consulting Group article entitled "The Mix that Matters: Innovation through Diversity" explains a study in which they sought to understand the relationship between diversity in managers (all management levels) and innovation (Lorenzo et al., 2017). The key findings of this study show that:

- The positive relationship between management diversity and innovation is statistically significant—and thus companies with higher levels of diversity derive more revenue from new products and services.
- The innovation boost isn't limited to a single type of diversity. The presence of managers who are either female or are from other countries, industries, or companies can cause an increase in innovation.
- Management diversity seems to have a particularly positive effect on innovation at complex companies—those that have multiple product lines or that operate in multiple industry segments.
- To reach its potential, gender diversity needs to go beyond tokenism. In the study, innovation performance only increased significantly when the workforce included more than 20% women in management positions. Having a high percentage of female employees doesn't increase innovation if only a small number of women are managers.
- At companies with diverse management teams, openness to contributions from lower-level workers and an environment in which employees feel free to speak their minds are crucial for fostering innovation.

When you consider the impact that diverse teams have on decision-making and problem-solving—through the discussion and incorporation of new perspectives, ideas, and data—it is no wonder that the BCG study shows greater innovation. Team leaders need to reflect upon these findings during the early stages of team selection so that they can reap the benefits of having diverse voices and backgrounds.

CHALLENGES AND BEST PRACTICES FOR WORKING WITH MULTICULTURAL TEAMS

As globalization has increased over the last decades, workplaces have felt the impact of working within multicultural teams. The earlier section on team diversity outlined some of the benefits of working on diverse teams, and a multicultural group certainly qualifies as diverse. However, some key practices are recommended to those who are leading multicultural teams to navigate the challenges that these teams may experience.

People may assume that communication is the key factor that can derail multicultural teams, as participants may have different languages and communication styles. In the *Harvard Business Review* article "Managing Multicultural Teams," Brett et al. (2006) outline four key cultural differences that can cause destructive conflicts in a team. The first difference is direct versus indirect communication, also known as **high-context** vs. **low-context communication.** Some cultures are very direct and explicit in their communication, while others are more indirect and ask questions rather than pointing out problems. This difference can cause conflict because, at the extreme, the direct style

may be considered offensive by some, while the indirect style may be perceived as unproductive and passive-aggressive in team interactions.

The second difference that multicultural teams may face is trouble with accents and fluency. When team members don't speak the same language, there may be one language that dominates the group interaction—and those who don't speak it may feel left out. The speakers of the primary language may feel that those members don't contribute as much or are less competent. The next challenge is when there are differing attitudes toward hierarchy. Some cultures are very respectful of the hierarchy and will treat team members based on that hierarchy. Other cultures are more egalitarian and don't observe hierarchical differences to the same degree. This may lead to clashes if some people feel that they are being disrespected and not treated according to their status. The final difference that may challenge multicultural teams is conflicting decision-making norms. Different cultures make decisions differently, and some will apply a great deal of analysis and preparation beforehand. Those cultures that make decisions more quickly (and need just enough information to make a decision) may be frustrated with the slow response and relatively longer thought process.

These cultural differences are good examples of how everyday team activities (decision-making, communication, interaction among team members) may become points of contention for a multicultural team if there isn't an adequate understanding of everyone's culture. The authors propose that there are several potential interventions to try if these conflicts arise. One simple intervention is *adaptation*, which is working with or around differences. This is best used when team members are willing to acknowledge the cultural differences and learn how to work with them. The next intervention technique is *structural intervention*, or reorganizing to reduce friction on the team. This technique is best used if there are unproductive subgroups or cliques within the team that need to be moved around. *Managerial intervention* is the technique of making decisions by management and without team involvement. This technique should be used sparingly, as it essentially shows that the team needs guidance and can't move forward without management getting involved. Finally, exit is an intervention of last resort and is the *voluntary or involuntary removal* of a team member. If the differences and challenges have proven to be so great that an individual on the team can no longer work with the team productively, then it may be necessary to remove the team member in question.

DEVELOPING CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

Some people seem to be innately aware of and able to work with cultural differences on teams and in their organizations. These individuals might be said to have cultural intelligence. **Cultural intelligence** is a competency and a skill that enables individuals to function effectively in cross-cultural environments. It develops as people become more aware of the influence of culture and more capable of adapting their behavior to the norms of other cultures. In the *IESE Insight* article entitled "Cultural Competence: Why It Matters and How You Can Acquire It," Lee and Liao (2015) assert that "multicultural leaders may relate better to team members from different cultures and resolve conflicts more easily. Their multiple talents can also be put to good use in international negotiations." Multicultural leaders don't have a lot of "baggage" from any one culture, and so are sometimes perceived as being culturally neutral. They are very good at handling diversity, which gives them a great advantage in their relationships with teammates.

To help people become better team members in a world that is increasingly multicultural, there are a few best practices that the authors recommend for honing cross-cultural skills. The first is to "broaden your mind"— expand your own cultural channels (travel, movies, books) and surround yourself with people from other cultures. This helps to raise your own awareness of the cultural differences and norms that you may encounter. Another best practice is to "develop your cross-cultural skills through practice" and experiential learning. You may have the opportunity to work or travel abroad — but if you don't, then getting to know some of your company's cross-cultural colleagues or foreign visitors will help you to practice your skills. Serving on a cross-cultural project team and taking the time to get to know and bond with your global colleagues is an excellent way to develop skills.

Once you have a sense of the different cultures and have started to work on developing your cross-cultural skills, another good practice is to "boost your cultural metacognition" and monitor your own behavior in multicultural situations. When you are in a situation in which you are interacting with multicultural individuals, you should test yourself and be aware of how you act and feel. Observe both your positive and negative interactions with people, and learn from them. Developing "cognitive complexity" is the final best practice for boosting multicultural skills. This is the most advanced, and it requires being able to view situations from more than one cultural framework. To see things from another perspective, you need to have a strong sense of emotional intelligence, empathy, and sympathy, and be willing to engage in honest communications.

In the *Harvard Business Review* article "Cultural Intelligence," Earley and Mosakowski (2004) describe three sources of cultural intelligence that teams should consider if they are serious about becoming more adept in their cross-cultural skills and understanding. These sources, very simply, are head, body, and heart. One first learns about the beliefs, customs, and taboos of foreign cultures via the **head**. Training programs are based on providing this type of overview information—which is helpful but obviously isn't experiential. This is the cognitive component of cultural intelligence. The second source, the **body**, involves more commitment and experimentation with the new culture. It is this physical component (demeanor, eye contact, posture, accent) that shows a deeper level of understanding of the new culture and its physical manifestations. The final source, the **heart**, deals with a person's own confidence in their ability to adapt to and deal well with cultures outside of their own. Heart really speaks to one's own level of emotional commitment and motivation to understand the new culture.

Earley and Mosakowski have created a quick assessment to diagnose cultural intelligence, based on these cognitive, physical, and emotional/motivational measures (i.e., head, body, heart). Please refer to the table below for a short diagnostic that allows you to assess your cultural intelligence.

ASSESSING YOUR CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

Give your responses using a 1 to 5 scale where 1 means that you strongly disagree and 5 means that you strongly agree with the statement.

Before I interact with people from a new culture, I wonder to myself what I hope to achieve.

If I encounter something unexpected while working in a new culture, I use that experience to build new ways to approach other cultures in the future.

I plan on how I am going to relate to people from a different culture before I meet with them.

When I come into a new cultural situation, I can immediately sense whether things are going well or if things are going wrong.

Add your total from the four questions above.

Divide the total by 4. This is your ***Cognitive Cultural Quotient***.

It is easy for me to change my body language (posture or facial expression) to suit people from a different culture.

I can alter my expressions when a cultural encounter requires it.

I can modify my speech style by changing my accent or pitch of my voice to suit people from different cultures.

I can easily change the way I act when a cross-cultural encounter seems to require it.

Add your total from the four questions above.

Divide the total by 4. This is your ***Cognitive Physical Quotient***.

I have confidence in my ability to deal well with people from different cultures than mine.

I am certain that I can befriend people of different cultural backgrounds than mine.

I can adapt to the lifestyle of a different culture with relative ease.

I am confident in my ability to deal with an unfamiliar cultural situation or encounter.

Add your total from the four questions above.

Divide the total by 4. This is your ***Emotional/Motivational Cognitive Quotient***.

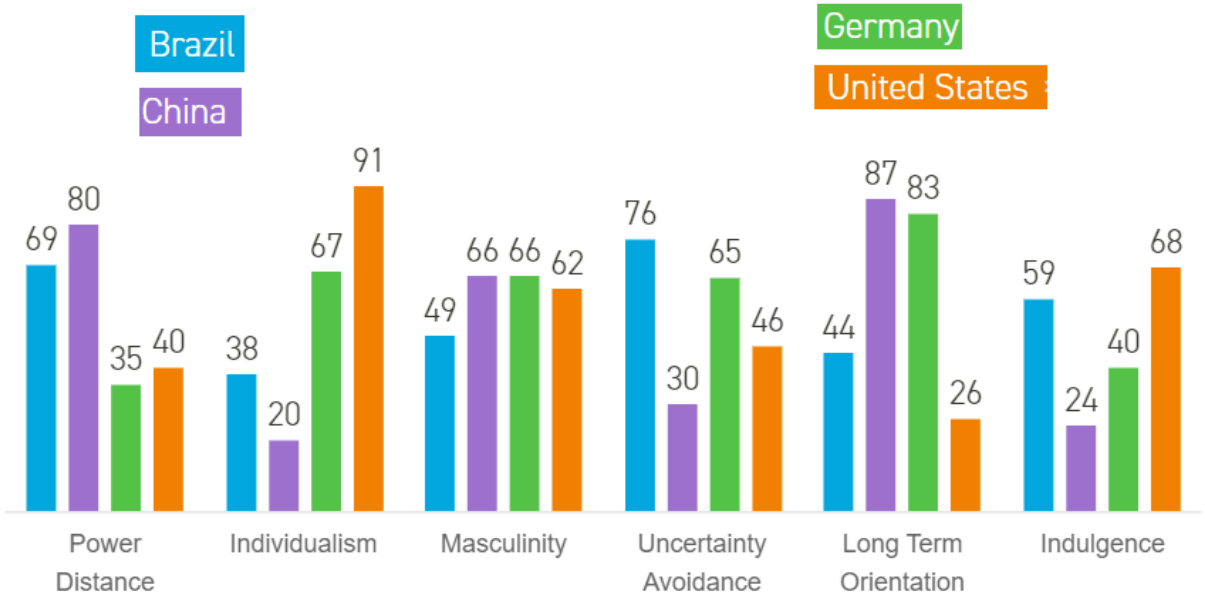
Generally, scoring below 3 in any one of the three measures signals an area requiring improvement. Averaging over 4 displays strength in cultural intelligence.

Adapted from "Cultural Intelligence," Earley and Mosakowski, Harvard Business Review, October 2004 (Credit: OpenStax/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

Cultural intelligence is an extension of emotional intelligence. An individual must have a level of awareness and understanding of the new culture so that he or she can adapt to the style, pace, language, nonverbal communication, etc., and work together successfully with the new culture. A multicultural team can only find success if its members take the time to understand each other and ensure that everyone feels included. Multiculturalism and cultural intelligence are traits that are taking on increasing importance in the business world today. By following best practices and avoiding the challenges and pitfalls that can derail a multicultural team, a team can find great success and personal fulfillment well beyond the boundaries of the project or work engagement.

DIGGING IN DEEPER: DIVERGENT CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

Let's dig in deeper by examining several points of divergence across cultures and consider how these dimensions might play out in organizations and in groups or teams.



Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory. Comparison of 4 countries: US, China, Germany, and Brazil in all 6 dimensions of the model.

LOW-POWER VERSUS HIGH-POWER DISTANCE

How comfortable are you with critiquing your boss's decisions? If you are from a low-power distance culture, your answer might be "no problem." In **low-power distance cultures**, according to Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede, people relate to one another more as equals and less as a reflection of dominant or subordinate roles, regardless of their actual formal roles as employee and manager, for example.

In a **high-power distance culture**, you would probably be much less likely to challenge the decision, to provide an alternative, or to give input. If you are working with people from a high-power distance culture, you may need to take extra care to elicit feedback and involve them in the discussion because their cultural framework may preclude their participation. They may have learned that less powerful people must accept decisions without comment, even if they have a concern or know there is a significant problem. Unless you are sensitive to cultural orientation and power distance, you may lose valuable information.

INDIVIDUALISTIC VERSUS COLLECTIVIST CULTURES

People in **individualistic cultures** value individual freedom and personal independence, and cultures always have stories to reflect their values. People who grew up in the United States may recall the story of Superman or John McLean in the *Diehard* series, and note how one person overcomes all obstacles. Through personal ingenuity, despite challenges, one person rises successfully to conquer or vanquish those obstacles. Sometimes there is an assist, as in basketball or football, where another person lends a hand, but still the story repeats itself again and again, reflecting the cultural viewpoint.

When Hofstede explored the concepts of individualism and collectivism across diverse cultures (Hofstede, 1982, 2001, 2005), he found that in individualistic cultures like the United States, people perceived their world primarily from their own viewpoint. They perceived themselves as empowered individuals, capable of making their own decisions, and able to make an impact on their own lives.

Cultural viewpoint is not an either/or dichotomy, but rather a continuum or range. You may belong to some communities that express individualistic cultural values, while others place the focus on a collective viewpoint. **Collectivist cultures** (Hofstede, 1982), including many in Asia and South America, focus on the needs of the nation, community, family, or group of workers. Ownership and private property is one way to examine this difference. In some cultures, property is almost exclusively private, while others tend toward community ownership. The collectively owned resource returns benefits to the community. Water, for example, has long been viewed as a community resource, much like air, but that has been changing as businesses and organizations have purchased water rights and gained control over resources. Public lands, such as parks, are often considered public, and individual exploitation of them is restricted. Copper, a metal with a variety of industrial applications, is collectively owned in Chile, with profits deposited in the general government fund. While public and private initiatives exist, the cultural viewpoint is our topic. How does someone raised in a culture that emphasizes the community interact with someone raised in a primarily individualistic culture? How could tensions be expressed and how might interactions be influenced by this point of divergence?

MASCULINE VERSUS FEMININE ORIENTATION

Hofstede describes the masculine-feminine dichotomy not in terms of whether men or women hold the power in a given culture, but rather the extent to which that culture values certain traits that may be considered **masculine** or **feminine**. Thus, "the assertive pole has been called 'masculine' and the modest, caring pole 'feminine.' The women in feminine countries have the same modest, caring values as the men; in the masculine countries, they are somewhat assertive and competitive, but not as much as the men, so that these countries show a gap between men's values and women's values" (Hofstede, 2009).

We can observe this difference in where people gather, how they interact, and how they dress. We can see it during business negotiations, where it may make an important difference in the success of the organizations involved. Cultural expectations precede the interaction, so someone who doesn't match those expectations may experience tension. Business in the United States has a masculine orientation—assertiveness and competition are highly valued. In other cultures, such as Sweden, business values are more attuned to modesty (lack of self-promotion) and taking care of society's weaker members. This range of differences is one aspect of intercultural communication that requires significant attention when the business communicator enters a new environment.

UNCERTAINTY-ACCEPTING CULTURES VERSUS UNCERTAINTY-REJECTING CULTURES

When we meet each other for the first time, we often use what we have previously learned to understand our current context. We also do this to reduce our uncertainty. Some cultures, such as the United States and Britain, are **highly tolerant of uncertainty**, while others go to great lengths

to reduce the element of surprise. Cultures in the Arab world, for example, are **high in uncertainty avoidance**; they tend to be resistant to change and reluctant to take risks. Whereas a U.S. business negotiator might enthusiastically agree to try a new procedure, an Egyptian counterpart would likely refuse to get involved until all the details are worked out.

SHORT-TERM VERSUS LONG-TERM ORIENTATION

Do you want your reward right now or can you dedicate yourself to a long-term goal? You may work in a culture whose people value immediate results and grow impatient when those results do not materialize. Geert Hofstede discusses this relationship of time orientation to a culture as a "time horizon," and it underscores the perspective of the individual within a cultural context. Many countries in Asia, influenced by the teachings of Confucius, value a long-term orientation, whereas other countries, including the United States, have a more short-term approach to life and results. Native American cultures are known for holding a long-term orientation, as illustrated by the proverb attributed to the Iroquois Confederacy that decisions require contemplation of their impact seven generations removed.

If you work within a culture that has a **short-term orientation**, you may need to place greater emphasis on reciprocation of greetings, gifts, and rewards. For example, if you send a thank-you note the morning after being treated to a business dinner, your host will appreciate your promptness. While there may be respect for tradition, there is also an emphasis on personal representation and honor, a reflection of identity and integrity. Personal stability and consistency are also valued in a short-term-oriented culture, contributing to an overall sense of predictability and familiarity.

Long-term orientation is often marked by persistence, thrift and frugality, and an order to relationships based on age and status. A sense of shame for the family and community is also observed across generations. What an individual does reflects on the family and is carried by immediate and extended family members.

TIME ORIENTATION

Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall (1987) state that monochronic time-oriented cultures consider one thing at a time, whereas polychronic time-oriented cultures schedule many things at one time, and time is considered in a more fluid sense. In **monochromatic time,** interruptions are to be avoided, and everything has its own specific time. Even the multitasker from a monochromatic culture will, for example, recognize the value of work first before play or personal time. The United States, Germany, and Switzerland are often noted as countries that value a monochromatic time orientation.

Polychromatic time looks a little more complicated, with business and family mixing with dinner and dancing. Greece, Italy, Chile, and Saudi Arabia are countries where one can observe this perception of time; business meetings may be scheduled at a fixed time, but when they actually begin may be another story. Also, note that the dinner invitation for 8 p.m. may in reality be more like 9 p.m. If you were to show up on time, you might be the first person to arrive and find that the hosts are not quite ready to receive you.

When in doubt, always ask before the event; many people from polychromatic cultures will be used to foreigner's tendency to be punctual, even compulsive, about respecting established times for events. The skilled business communicator is aware of this difference and takes steps to anticipate it. The value of time in different cultures is expressed in many ways, and your understanding can help you communicate more effectively.

Review & Reflection Questions

- Why are diverse teams better at decision-making and problem-solving?
- What are some of the challenges that multicultural teams face?
- How might you further cultivate your own cultural intelligence?
- What are some potential points of divergence between cultures? How might these play out in teams?

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AUTHOR & ATTRIBUTION

The sections "How Does Team Diversity Enhance Decision Making and Problem Solving?" and "Challenges and Best Practices for Working with Multicultural Teams" are adapted from Black, J.S., & Bright, D.S. (2019). *Organizational behavior.* OpenStax. https://openstax.org/books/organizational-behavior/. Access the full chapter for free here. The content is available under a Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 license.

The section "Digging in Deeper: Divergent Cultural Dimensions" is adapted from "Divergent Cultural Characteristics" in *Business Communication for Success* from the University of Minnesota. The book was adapted from a work produced and distributed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA) by a publisher who has requested that they and the original author not receive attribution. This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

CHAPTER 6.

NEGOTIATING POWER IN GROUPS

Learning Objectives

- Explain different conceptualizations of power
- Describe the relationship between power and oppression
- Discuss behaviors associated with high status in a group
- Differentiate between the common power bases in groups
- Discuss what it means to exercise power ethically

Given the complexity of group interaction, it is short-sighted to try to understand group communication without looking at notions of power. Power influences how we interpret the messages of others and determines the extent to which we feel we have the right to speak up and voice our concerns and opinions to others. Power and status are key ways that people exercise influence within groups. In the storming phase of group development, members are likely to engage in more obvious power struggles, but power is constantly at work in our interactions within and outside our group whether we are fully conscious of it or not. In this chapter, we will define power and discuss its relationship to broader systems in which we may operate, and status within groups. We will also discuss the bases and tactics of power that can operate in groups and teams, as well as the ethical use of power.

DEFINING POWER

Take a moment to reflect on the different ways you think about power. What images come to mind for you when you think of power? Are there different kinds of power? Are some people inherently more powerful than others? Do you consider yourself to be a powerful person? We highlight three ways to understand power as it relates to group and team communication. The word "power" literally means "to be able" and has many implications.

If you associate power with control or dominance, this refers to the notion of power as **power-over**. According to Starhawk (1987), "power-over *enables one individual or group to make the decisions that affect*

others, and to enforce control" (p. 9). Control can and does take many forms in society. Starhawk explains that,

> *This power is wielded from the workplace, in the schools, in the courts, in the doctor's office. It may rule with weapons that are physical or by controlling the resources we need to live: money, food, medical care; or by controlling more subtle resources: information, approval, love. We are so accustomed to power-over, so steeped in its language and its implicit threats, that we often become aware of its functioning only when we see its extreme manifestations. (p. 9)*

When we are in group situations and someone dominates the conversation, makes all of the decisions, or controls the resources of the group such as money or equipment, this is power-over.

Power-from-within refers to a more personal sense of strength or agency. Power-from-within manifests *itself when we can stand, walk, and speak "words that convey our needs and thoughts"* (Starhawk, 1987, p. 10). In groups, this type of power "arises from our sense of connection, our bonding with other human beings, and with the environment" (10). As Heider explains in The Tao of Leadership, "Since all creation is a whole, separateness is an illusion. Like it or not, we are team players. Power comes through cooperation, independence through service, and a greater self through selflessness" (77). If you think about your role in groups, how have you influenced other group members? Your strategies indicate your sense of power-from-within.

Finally, groups manifest **power-with**, which is "*the power of a strong individual in a group of equals, the power not to command, but to suggest and be listened to, to begin something and see it happen"* (Starhawk, 1987, p. 10). For this to be effective in a group or team, at least two qualities must be present among members: (1) all group members must communicate respect and equality for one another, and (2) the leader must not abuse power-with and attempt to turn it into power-over. Have you ever been involved in a group where people did not treat each other as equals or with respect? How did you feel about the group? What was the outcome? Could you have done anything to change that dynamic?

UNDERSTANDING POWER AND OPPRESSION

(Credit: National Numismatic Collection, National Museum of American History/1854 $3 Indian Princess Head/Public Domain).

Power and oppression can be said to be mirror reflections of one another in a sense or two sides of the same coin. Where you see power that causes harm, you will likely see oppression. *Oppression* is defined in *Merriam-Webster dictionary* as: "Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power especially by the imposition of burdens; the condition of being weighed down; an act of pressing down; a sense of heaviness or obstruction in the body or mind." This definition demonstrates the intensity of oppression, which also shows how difficult such a challenge is to address or eradicate. Further, the word oppression comes from the Latin root *primere*, which actually means "pressed down". Importantly, we can conclude that oppression is the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, group, or institution.

Oppression emerges as a result of power, with its roots in global colonialism and conquests. For example, oppression as an action can deny certain groups jobs that pay living wages, can establish unequal education (e.g., through a lack of adequate capital per student for resources), can deny affordable housing, and the list goes on. You may be wondering why some groups live in poverty, reside in substandard housing, or simply do not 'measure up' to the dominant society in some facet. As discussed at a seminar at the Leaven Center (2003), groups that do not have "power over" are those society classifies or labels as **disenfranchised**; they are often exploited and victimized in a variety of ways. They may be subjected to restrictions and seen as expendable and replaceable. This philosophy, in turn, minimizes the roles certain populations play in society. As a result, people often deny that this injustice occurs and blame oppressive conditions on the behaviors and actions of the oppressed group.

Oppression subsequently becomes a system as patterns are adopted and perpetuated. **Systems of oppression** discriminate or advantage based on perceived or real differences among people. Socialization patterns help maintain such systems. Through formal and informal education, engagement with media, and communication with and observations of others around them, people learn who and what is valued, how they should act, and what their role and place are in society.

So what do these systems mean for groups? Members in groups do not leave their identities or social and cultural contexts at the door. Power and status in groups are still shaped by these broader systems that are external to the group. This requires group members to reflect on how these systems are shaping dynamics within the group and their own perceptions and behaviors.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POWER AND STATUS

One way that these dynamics can play out in groups is related to a group member's status. **Status** can be defined as a person's perceived level of importance or significance within a particular context. Those who have status tend to experience privileges. In a group, members with higher status are apt to command greater respect and possess more prestige and power than those with lower status.

Our status is often tied to our identities and their perceived value within our social and cultural context. Groups may confer status upon their members based on their age, wealth, gender, race or ethnicity, ability, physical stature, perceived intelligence, and/or other attributes. Status can also be granted through title or position. In professional circles, for instance, having earned a "terminal" degree such as a Ph.D. or M.D. usually generates a degree of status. The same holds true for the documented outcomes of schooling or training in legal, engineering, or other professional fields. Likewise, people who've been honored for achievements in any number of areas may bring status to a group by virtue of that recognition if it relates to the nature and purpose of the group. Once a group has formed and begun to sort out its norms, it will also build upon the initial status that people bring to it by further allocating status according to its own internal processes and practices. For instance, choosing a member to serve as an officer in a group generally conveys status to that person.

Let's say you've either come into a group with high status or have been granted high status by the other members. What does this mean to you, and how are you apt to behave? Here are some predictions based on research from several sources (Beebe & Masterson, 2015; Borman, 1989; Brilhart & Galanes, 1997; Homans, 1992).

[12]First, the volume and direction of your speech will differ from those of others in the group. You'll talk more than the low-status members do, and you'll communicate more with other high-status members than you will with lower-status individuals. In addition, you'll be more likely to speak to the whole group than will members with lower status.

Second, some indicators of your participation will be particularly positive. Your activity level and self-regard will surpass those of lower-status group members. So will your level of satisfaction with your position. Furthermore, the rest of the group is less likely to ignore your statements and proposals than it is to disregard what lower-status individuals say.

Finally, the content of your communication will probably be different from what your fellow members discuss. Because you may have access to special information about the group's activities and may be expected to shoulder specific responsibilities because of your position, you're apt to talk about

1.
2.

topics that are relevant to the central purposes and direction of the group. Lower-status members, on the other hand, are likely to communicate more about other matters.

Those with higher status may communicate differently than those with lower status in group contexts like meetings. (Credit: United States Mission Geneva/Flickr/CC BY 2.0).

There's no such thing as a "status neutral" group—one in which everyone always has the same status as everyone else. Differences in status within a group are inevitable and can be dangerous if not recognized and managed. For example, someone who gains status without possessing the skills or attributes required to use it well may cause real damage to other members of a group, or a group as a whole. A high-status, low-ability person may develop an inflated self-image, begin to abuse power, or both. One of us worked for the new president of a college who acted as though his position entitled him to take whatever actions he wanted. In the process of interacting primarily with other high-status individuals who shared the majority of his viewpoints and goals, he overlooked or rejected concerns and complaints from people in other parts of the organization. Turmoil and dissension broke out. Morale plummeted. The president eventually suffered votes of no confidence from his college's faculty, staff, and students and was forced to resign.

BASES OF POWER IN GROUPS

Within groups, there are several different ways in which power can operate. French and Raven (1968) identified five primary ways in which power can be exerted in social situations, including in groups and teams. These are considered to be different **bases of power.**

REFERENT POWER

In some cases, person *B* looks up to or admires person *A,* and, as a result, *B* follows *A* largely because of *A*'s personal qualities, characteristics, or reputation. In this case, *A* can use **referent power** to influence *B*. Referent power has also been called *charismatic power,* because allegiance is based on the interpersonal attraction of one individual for another. Examples of referent power can be seen in advertising, where companies use celebrities to recommend their products; it is hoped that the star appeal of the person will rub off on the products. In work environments, junior managers

often emulate senior managers and assume unnecessarily subservient roles more because of personal admiration than because of respect for authority.

EXPERT POWER

Expert power is demonstrated when person *A* gains power because *A* has knowledge or expertise relevant to *B*. For instance, professors presumably have power in the classroom because of their mastery of a particular subject matter. Other examples of expert power can be seen in staff specialists in organizations (e.g., accountants, labor relations managers, management consultants, and corporate attorneys). In each case, the individual has credibility in a particular—and narrow—area as a result of experience and expertise, and this gives the individual power in that domain.

LEGITIMATE POWER

Legitimate power exists when person *B* submits to person *A* because *B* feels that *A* has a right to exert power in a certain domain (Tjosvold, 1985). Legitimate power is really another name for authority. A supervisor has a right, for instance, to assign work. Legitimate power differs from reward and coercive power in that it depends on the official position a person holds, and not on his or her relationship with others.

REWARD POWER

Reward power exists when person *A* has power over person *B* because *A* controls rewards that *B* wants. These rewards can cover a wide array of possibilities, including pay raises, promotions, desirable job assignments, more responsibility, new equipment, and so forth. Research has indicated that reward power often leads to increased job performance as employees see a strong performance-reward contingency (Shetty, 1978). However, in many organizations, supervisors and managers really do not control very many rewards. For example, salary and promotion among most blue-collar workers is based on a labor contract, not a performance appraisal.

COERCIVE POWER

Coercive power is based primarily on fear. Here, person *A* has power over person *B* because *A* can administer some form of punishment to *B*. Thus, this kind of power is also referred to as punishment power. As Kipnis (1976) points out, coercive power does not have to rest on the threat of violence. "Individuals exercise coercive power through a reliance upon physical strength, verbal facility, or the ability to grant or withhold emotional support from others. These bases provide the individual with the means to physically harm, bully, humiliate, or deny love to others." Examples of coercive power in organizations include the ability (actual or implied) to fire or demote people, transfer them to undesirable jobs or locations, or strip them of valued perquisites. Indeed, it has been suggested that a good deal of organizational behavior (such as prompt attendance, looking busy, avoiding whistle-blowing) can be attributed to coercive, not reward, power. As Kipnis (1976) explains, "Of all the bases of power available to man, the power to hurt others is possibly the most often used, most often condemned and most difficult to control."

CONSEQUENCES OF POWER

We have seen, then, that at least five bases of power can be identified. In each case, the power of the individual rests on a particular attribute of the power holder, the follower, or their relationship. In some cases (e.g., reward power), power rests in the superior; in others (e.g., referent power), power is given to the superior by the subordinate. In all cases, the exercise of power involves subtle and sometimes threatening interpersonal consequences for the parties involved. In fact, when power is exercised, individuals have several ways in which to respond. These are shown in **Figure 1.**

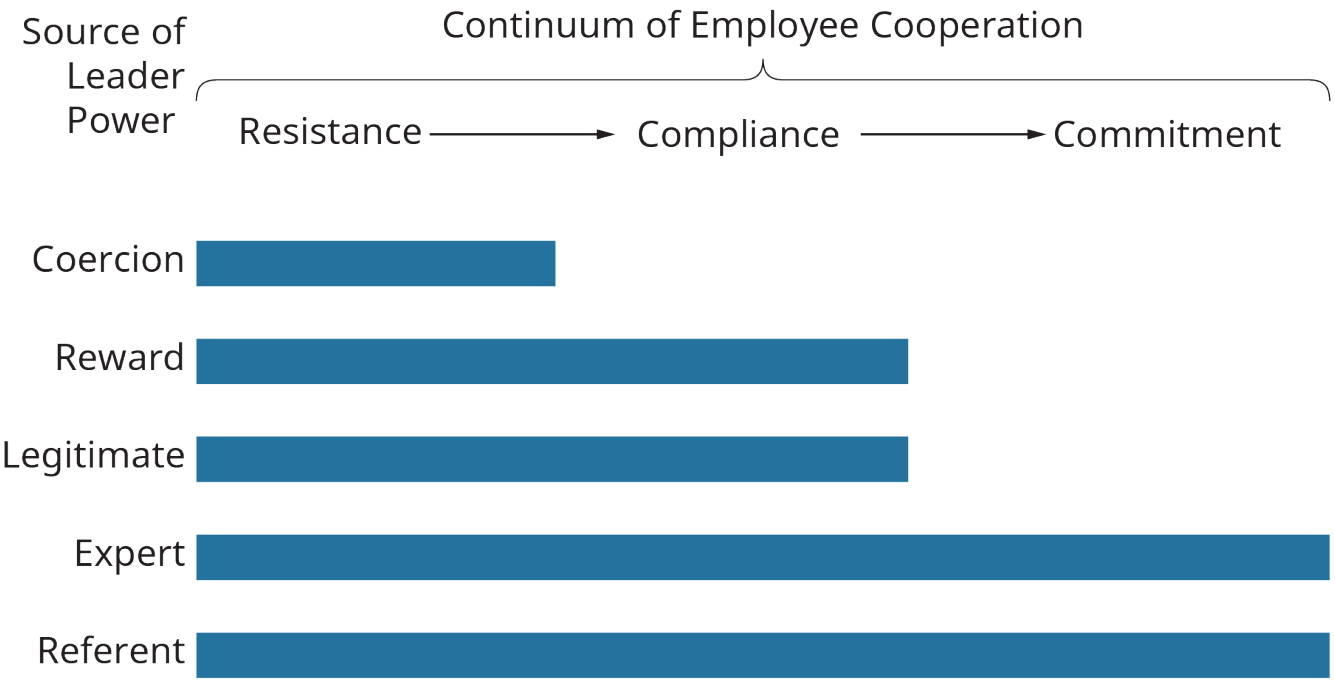

Figure 1 *(Credit: Rice University Openstax/Employee Reactions to Bases of Power/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.*

If the subordinate accepts and identifies with the leader, their behavioral response will probably be one of *commitment.* That is, the subordinate will be motivated to follow the wishes of the leader. This is most likely to happen when the person in charge uses referent or expert power. Under these circumstances, the follower believes in the leader's cause and will exert considerable energies to help the leader succeed.

A second possible response is *compliance.* This occurs most frequently when the subordinate feels the leader has either legitimate power or reward power. Under such circumstances, the follower will comply, either because it is perceived as a duty or because a reward is expected; but commitment or enthusiasm for the project is lacking. Finally, under conditions of coercive power, subordinates will more than likely use *resistance*. Here, the subordinate sees little reason—either altruistic or material—for cooperating and will often engage in a series of tactics to defeat the leader's efforts.

POWER DEPENDENCIES

In any situation involving power, at least two persons (or groups) can be identified: (1) the person

attempting to influence others and (2) the target or targets of that influence. Until recently, attention focused almost exclusively on how people tried to influence others. More recently attention has been given to how people try to nullify or moderate such influence attempts. In particular, we now recognize that the extent to which influence attempts are successful is determined in large part by the **power dependencies** of those on the receiving end of the influence attempts. In other words, all people are not subject to (or dependent upon) the same bases of power. What causes some people to be vulnerable to power attempts? At least three factors have been identified (Mitchell & Larson, 1988).

Subordinate's Values

To begin, person *B*'s values can influence his susceptibility to influence. For example, if the outcomes that *A* can influence are important to *B*, then *B* is more likely to be open to influence than if the outcomes were unimportant. Hence, if an employee places a high value on money and believes the supervisor actually controls pay raises, we would expect the employee to be highly susceptible to the supervisor's influence. We hear comments about how young people don't really want to work hard anymore. Perhaps a reason for this phenomenon is that some young people don't place a high value on those things (for example, money) that traditionally have been used to influence behavior. In other words, such complaints may really be saying that young people are more difficult to influence than they used to be.

Nature of Relationship

In addition, the nature of the relationship between *A* and *B* can be a factor in power dependence. Are *A* and *B* peers or superior and subordinate? Is the job permanent or temporary? A person on a temporary job, for example, may feel less need to acquiesce, because he won't be holding the position for long. Moreover, if *A* and *B* are peers or good friends, the influence process is likely to be more delicate than if they are superior and subordinate.

Counterpower

Finally, a third factor to consider in power dependencies is **counterpower**. The concept of counterpower focuses on the extent to which *B* has other sources of power to buffer the effects of *A*'s power. For example, if *B* is unionized, the union's power may serve to negate *A*'s influence attempts. The use of counterpower can be clearly seen in a variety of situations where various coalitions attempt to bargain with one another and check the power of their opponents.

Figure 2 presents a rudimentary model that combines the concepts of bases of power with the notion of power dependencies. As can be seen, *A*'s bases of power interact with *B*'s extent of power dependency to determine *B*'s response to *A*'s influence attempt. If *A* has significant power and *B* is highly dependent, we would expect *B* to comply with *A*'s wishes.

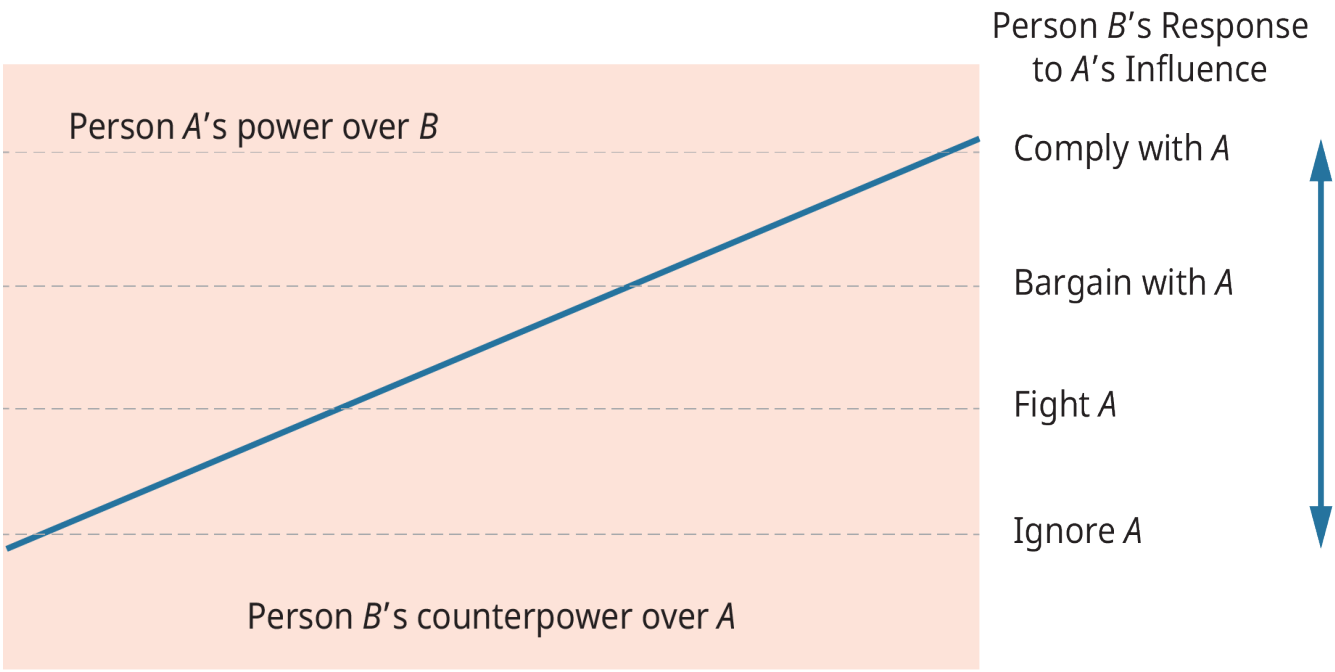

Figure 2 *(Credit: Rice University Openstax/Typical Response Patterns in Dyadic Power Relationships/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).*

If *A* has more modest power over *B,* but *B* is still largely power dependent, *B* may try to bargain with *A*. Despite the fact that *B would* be bargaining from an unstable/weaker position, this strategy may serve to protect *B*'s interests better than outright compliance. For instance, if your boss asked you to work overtime, you might attempt to strike a deal whereby you would get compensatory time off at a later date. If successful, although you would not have decreased your working hours, at least you would not have increased them. Where power distribution is more evenly divided, *B* may attempt to develop a cooperative working relationship with *A* in which both parties gain from the exchange. An example of this position is a labor contract negotiation where labor-management relations are characterized by a balance of power and a good working relationship.

If *B* has more power than *A, B* will more than likely reject *A*'s influence attempt. *B* may even become the aggressor and attempt to influence *A*. Finally, when *B* is not certain of the power relationships, he may simply try to ignore *A*'s efforts. In doing so, *B* will discover either that *A* does indeed have more power or that *A* cannot muster the power to be successful. A good illustration of this last strategy can be seen in some companies' responses to early governmental efforts to secure equal opportunities for minorities and women. These companies simply ignored governmental efforts until new regulations forced compliance.

USES OF POWER

As we look at our groups and teams as well as our organizations, it is easy to see manifestations of power almost anywhere. In fact, there are a wide variety of power-based methods used to influence others. Here, we will examine two aspects of the use of power: commonly used power tactics and the ethical use of power.

COMMON POWER TACTICS IN ORGANIZATIONS

As noted above, many power tactics are available for use. However, as we will see, some are more ethical than others. Here, we look at some of the more commonly used power tactics found in both business and public organizations (Pfeffer, 2011) that also have relevance for groups.

Controlling Access to Information

Most decisions rest on the availability of relevant information, so persons *controlling access to information* play a major role in decisions made. A good example of this is the common corporate practice of pay secrecy. Only the personnel department and senior managers typically have salary information—and power—for personnel decisions.

Controlling Access to Persons

Another related power tactic is the practice of *controlling access to persons.* A well-known factor contributing to President Nixon's downfall was his isolation from others. His two senior advisers had complete control over who saw the president. Similar criticisms were leveled against President Reagan.

Selective Use of Objective Criteria

Very few questions have one correct answer; instead, decisions must be made concerning the most appropriate criteria for evaluating results. As such, significant power can be exercised by those who can practice *selective use of objective criteria* that will lead to a decision favorable to themselves. According to Herbert Simon, if an individual is permitted to select decision criteria, then that person needn't care who actually makes the decision. Attempts to control objective decision criteria can be seen in faculty debates in a university or college over who gets hired or promoted. One group tends to emphasize teaching and will attempt to set criteria for employment dealing with teacher competence, subject area, interpersonal relations, and so on. Another group may emphasize research and will try to set criteria related to the number of publications, reputation in the field, and so on.

Controlling the Agenda

One of the simplest ways to influence a decision is to ensure that it never comes up for consideration in the first place. There are a variety of strategies used for *controlling the agenda.* Efforts may be made to order the topics at a meeting in such a way that the undesired topic is last on the list. Failing this, opponents may raise several objections or points of information concerning the topic that cannot be easily answered, thereby tabling the topic until another day.

Using Outside Experts

Still, another means to gain an advantage is *using outside experts.* The unit wishing to exercise power may take the initiative and bring in experts from the field or experts known to be in sympathy with their cause. Hence, when a dispute arises over spending more money on research versus actual production, we would expect differing answers from outside research consultants and outside production consultants. Most consultants have experienced situations in which their clients fed them information and biases they hoped the consultant would repeat in a meeting.

Bureaucratic Gamesmanship

In some situations, the organization's own policies and procedures provide ammunition for power plays, or *bureaucratic gamesmanship.* For instance, a group may drag its feet on making changes in the workplace by creating red tape, work slowdowns, or "work to rule." (Working to rule occurs when employees diligently follow every work rule and policy statement to the letter; this typically results in the organization's grinding to a halt as a result of the many and often conflicting rules and policy statements.) In this way, the group lets it be known that the workflow will continue to slow down until they get their way.

Coalitions and Alliances

The final power tactic to be discussed here is that of *coalitions* and *alliances.* One unit can effectively increase its power by forming an alliance with other groups that share similar interests. This technique is often used when multiple labor unions in the same corporation join forces to gain contract concessions for their workers. It can also be seen in the tendency of corporations within one industry to form trade associations to lobby for their position. Although the various members of a coalition need not agree on everything—indeed, they may be competitors—sufficient agreement on the problem under consideration is necessary as a basis for action.

ETHICAL USE OF POWER

Several guidelines for the ethical use of power can be identified. These can be arranged according to our previous discussion of the five bases of power, as shown in **Table 1**. As will be noted, several techniques are available that accomplish their aims without compromising ethical standards. For example, a person using reward power can verify compliance with work directives, ensure that all requests are both feasible and reasonable, make only ethical or proper requests, offer rewards that are valued, and ensure that all rewards for good performance are credible and reasonably attainable.

***Table 1*: The Ethical Use of Power**

Basis of Power	*Guidelines for Use*
Referent power	• Treat subordinates fairly • Defend subordinates' interests • Be sensitive to subordinates' needs, feelings • Select subordinates similar to oneself • Engage in role modeling
Expert power	• Promote the image of expertise • Maintain credibility • Act confident and decisive • Keep informed • Recognize employee concerns • Avoid threatening subordinates' self-esteem
Legitimate power	• Be cordial and polite • Be confident • Be clear and follow up to verify understanding • Make sure the request is appropriate • Explain reasons for the request • Follow proper channels • Exercise power regularly • Enforce compliance • Be sensitive to subordinates' concerns
Reward power	• Verify compliance • Make feasible, reasonable requests • Make only ethical, proper requests • Offer rewards desired by subordinates • Offer only credible rewards
Coercive power	• Inform subordinates of rules and penalties • Warn before punishing • Administer punishment consistently and uniformly • Understand the situation before acting • Maintain credibility • Fit punishment to the infraction • Punish in private

Credit: Rice University/Openstax/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. Source: Adapted from Yukl (2013).

Even coercive power can be used without jeopardizing personal integrity. For example, a manager can make sure that all employees know the rules and penalties for rule infractions, provide warnings

before punishing, administer punishments fairly and uniformly, and so forth. The point here is that people have at their disposal numerous tactics that they can employ without abusing their power.

Review & Reflection Questions

- Before reading the chapter, how did you define power? How might power-to, power-from-within, and power-with make us think about power differently?
- What is the relationship between power and oppression?
- When you first joined your group, what assumptions did you make about the status of different members? Where did those assumptions come from?
- Identify five bases of power, and provide an example of each. Which base (or bases) of power do you feel would be most commonly found in groups?
- How can we exercise power ethically? What might be some best practices in the context of your group?

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AUTHOR AND ATTRIBUTION

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The sections "Bases of Power" and "Uses of Power" are adapted from "Organizational Power and Politics" Black, J.S., & Bright, D.S. (2019). *Organizational behavior.* OpenStax. https://openstax.org/books/organizational-behavior/. Access the full chapter for free here. The content is available under a Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 license.

The section "Understanding Power and Oppression" is adapted from Palmer, G.L, Ferńandez, J. S., Lee, G., Masud, H., Hilson, S., Tang, C., Thomas, D., Clark, L., Guzman, B., & Bernai, I. Oppression and power. In L. A. Jason, O. Glantsman, J. F. O'Brien, & K. N. Ramian (Eds.), *Introduction to Community Psychology*. Pressbooks. https://press.rebus.community/introductiontocommunitypsychology/. The content is available under a Creative Commons Attribution International 4.0 License.

PART III.

SUSTAINING GROUPS

This section provides information on the key processes and practices for maintaining groups.

CHAPTER 7.

CULTIVATING A SUPPORTIVE GROUP CLIMATE

Learning Objectives

- Define group cohesion and group climate
- Explain symbolic convergence theory and its relationship to group cohesion
- Identify communication behaviors that contribute to supportive vs. defensive group climates

Any time a group of people comes together, new dynamics are put into place that differ from the dynamics present in our typical dyadic interactions. The impressions we form about other people's likeability and the way we think about a group's purpose are affected by the climate within a group that is created by all members. In this chapter, we will define group cohesion and climate as well as discuss specific communication behaviors that can contribute to supportive and defensive group climates.

DEFINING GROUP COHESION AND CLIMATE

When something is **cohesive**, it sticks together, and the cohesion within a group helps establish an overall group climate. **Group climate** refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members. To better understand cohesion and climate, we can examine two types of cohesion: task and social.

Task cohesion refers to the commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group. **Social cohesion** refers to the attraction and liking among group members. Ideally, groups would have an appropriate balance between these two types of cohesion relative to the group's purpose, with task-oriented groups having higher task cohesion and relational-oriented groups having higher social cohesion. Even the most task-focused groups need some degree of social cohesion, and vice versa, but the balance will be determined by the purpose of the group and the individual members. For example, a team of workers from the local car dealership may join a local summer softball league because they're good friends and love the game. They may end up beating the team of faculty members from the community college who joined the league just to get to know each other better and have an excuse

to get together and drink beer in the afternoon. In this example, the players from the car dealership exhibit high social and task cohesion, while the faculty exhibit high social but low task cohesion.

Cohesive groups have an appropriate balance between task and social cohesion. (Credit: Brooke Cagle/Unsplash)

Cohesion benefits a group in many ways and can be assessed through specific group behaviors and characteristics. Groups with an appropriate level of cohesiveness (Hargie, 2011):

- set goals easily;
- exhibit a high commitment to achieving the purpose of the group;
- are more productive;
- experience fewer attendance issues;
- have group members who are willing to stick with the group during times of difficulty;
- have satisfied group members who identify with, promote, and defend the group;
- have members who are willing to listen to each other and offer support and constructive criticism; and
- experience less anger and tension.

Appropriate levels of group cohesion usually create a positive group climate, since group climate is affected by members' satisfaction with the group. Climate has also been described as group morale.

The following are some qualities that contribute to a positive group climate and morale (Marston & Hecht, 1988):

- **Participation.** Group members feel better when they feel included in the discussion and a part of the functioning of the group.
- **Messages.** Confirming messages help build relational dimensions within a group, and clear, organized, and relevant messages help build task dimensions within a group.
- **Feedback.** Positive, constructive, and relevant feedback contribute to the group climate.
- **Equity.** Aside from individual participation, group members also like to feel as if participation is managed equally within the group and that appropriate turn-taking is used.
- **Clear and accepted roles.** Group members like to know how status and hierarchy operate within a group. Knowing the roles isn't enough to lead to satisfaction, though—members must also be comfortable with and accept those roles.
- **Motivation.** Member motivation is activated by perceived connection to and relevance of the group's goals or purpose.

Group cohesion and climate are also demonstrated through symbolic convergence (Bormann, 1985). Have you ever been in a group that had 'inside jokes' that someone outside the group just would not understand? **Symbolic convergence** refers to the sense of community or group consciousness that develops in a group through non-task-related communication such as stories and jokes. The originator of symbolic convergence theory, Ernest Bormann, claims that the sharing of group fantasies creates symbolic convergence. *Fantasy*, in this sense, doesn't refer to fairy tales, sexual desire, or untrue things. In group communication, group fantasies are verbalized references to events outside the "here and now" of the group, including references to the group's past, predictions for the future, or other communication about people or events outside the group (Griffin, 2009). For example, as a graduate student, I spent a lot of time talking with others in our small group about research, writing, and other things related to our classes and academia in general. Most of this communication wouldn't lead to symbolic convergence or help establish the strong social bonds that we developed as a group. Instead, it was our grad student "war stories" about excessive reading loads and unreasonable paper requirements we had experienced in earlier years of grad school, horror stories about absent or vindictive thesis advisors, and "you won't believe this" stories from the classes that we were teaching that brought us together.

As symbolic convergence theory suggests, non-task-related communication such as stories, jokes, or shared experiences can actually be valuable for groups. (Credit: Priscilla Du Preez/Unsplash)

In any group, you can tell when symbolic convergence is occurring by observing how people share such fantasies and how group members react to them. If group members react positively and agree with or appreciate the teller's effort or other group members are triggered to tell their own related stories, then convergence is happening and cohesion and climate are being established. Over time, these fantasies build a shared vision of the group and what it means to be a member that creates a shared group consciousness. By reviewing and applying the concepts in this section, you can hopefully identify potential difficulties with group cohesion and work to enhance cohesion when needed to create more positive group climates and enhance your future group interactions.

SUPPORTIVE AND DEFENSIVE GROUP CLIMATES

Communication is key to developing positive group climates. This requires groups to attend to the supportive and defensive communication behaviors taking place in their groups. **Defensive communication** is defined as that communication behavior that occurs when an individual perceives threat or anticipates threat in the group. Those who behave defensively, even though they also give some attention to the common task, devote an appreciable portion of energy to defending themselves. Besides talking about the topic, they think about how they appear to others, how they may be seen more favorably, how they may win, dominate, impress or escape punishment, and/or how they may avoid or mitigate a perceived attack.

Such inner feelings and outward acts tend to create similarly defensive postures in others; and, if unchecked, the ensuing circular response becomes increasingly destructive. Defensive communication behavior, in short, engenders defensive listening, and this, in turn, produces postural, facial, and verbal cues which raise the defense level of the original communicator. Defense arousal prevents the listener from concentrating upon the message. Not only do defensive communicators send off multiple value, motive, and affect cues, but also defensive recipients distort what they receive. As a person becomes more and more defensive, he or she becomes less and less able to perceive accurately the motives, values, and emotions of the sender. Defensive behaviors have been correlated positively with losses in efficiency in communication.

The converse, moreover, also is true. The more "supportive" or defense-reductive the climate, the less the receiver reads into the communication distorted loadings that arise from projections of their own anxieties, motives, and concerns. As defenses are reduced, the receivers become better able to concentrate upon the structure, the content, and the cognitive meanings of the message.

Jack Gibb (1961) developed six pairs of defensive and supportive communication categories presented below. Behavior which a listener perceives as possessing any of the characteristics listed in the left-hand column arouses defensiveness, whereas that which he interprets as having any of the qualities designated as supportive reduces defensive feelings. The degree to which these reactions occur depends upon the person's level of defensiveness and the general climate in the group at the time.

***Table 1*: Communication in Defensive vs. Supportive Climates**

Defensive Climates	*Supportive Climates*
1. Evaluation	1. Description
2. Control	2. Problem Orientation
3. Strategy	3. Spontaneity
4. Neutrality	4. Empathy
5. Superiority	5. Equality
6. Certainty	6. Provisionalism

EVALUATION AND DESCRIPTION

Speech or other behavior which appears evaluative increases defensiveness. If by expression, manner of speech, tone of voice, or verbal content the sender seems to be evaluating or judging the listener, the receiver goes on guard. Of course, other factors may inhibit the reaction. If the listener thought that the speaker regarded him/her as an equal and was being open and spontaneous, for example, the evaluativeness in a message would be neutralized and perhaps not even perceived. This same principle applies equally to the other five categories of potentially defense-producing climates. These six sets are interactive.

Because our attitudes toward other persons are frequently, and often necessarily, evaluative, expressions that the defensive person will regard as nonjudgmental are hard to frame. Even the simplest question usually conveys the answer that the sender wishes or implies the response that would fit into his or her value system. A mother, for example, immediately following an earth tremor that shook the house, sought for her small son with the question, "Bobby, where are you?" The timid and plaintive "Mommy, I didn't do it" indicated how Bobby's chronic mild defensiveness predisposed him to react with a projection of his own guilt and in the context of his chronic assumption that questions are full of accusation.

Anyone who has attempted to train professionals to use information-seeking speech with neutral affect appreciates how difficult it is to teach a person to say even the simple "who did that?" without being seen as accusing. Speech is so frequently judgmental that there is a reality base for the defensive interpretations which are so common.

When insecure, group members are particularly likely to place blame, to see others as fitting into categories of good or bad, to make moral judgments of their colleagues, and to question the value, motive, and affect loadings of the speech which they hear. Since value loadings imply a judgment of others, a belief that the standards of the speaker differ from his or her own causes the listener to become defensive.

Descriptive speech, in contrast to that which is evaluative, tends to arouse a minimum of uneasiness. Speech acts which the listener perceives as genuine requests for information or as material with neutral loadings are descriptive. Specifically, the presentation of feelings, events, perceptions, or processes which do not ask or imply that the receiver change behavior or attitude is minimally defense producing.

CONTROL AND PROBLEM ORIENTATION

Speech that is used to control the listener evokes resistance. In most of our social interactions, someone is trying to do something to someone else—to change an attitude, to influence behavior, or to restrict the field of activity. The degree to which attempts to control produce defensiveness depends upon the openness of the effort, for a suspicion that hidden motives exist heightens resistance. For this reason, attempts of non-directive therapists and progressive educators to refrain from imposing a set of values, a point of view, or a problem solution upon the receivers meet with many barriers. Since the norm is control, non-controllers must earn the perception that their efforts have no hidden motives. A bombardment of persuasive "messages" in the fields of politics, education, special causes, advertising, religion, medicine, industrial relations, and guidance has bred cynical and paranoid responses in listeners.

Implicit in all attempts to alter another person is the assumption by the change agent that the person to be altered is inadequate. That the speaker secretly views the listener as ignorant, unable to make his or her own decisions, uninformed, immature, unwise, or possessed of wrong or inadequate attitudes is a subconscious perception that gives the latter a valid base for defensive reactions.

STRATEGY AND SPONTANEITY

When the sender is perceived as engaged in a stratagem involving ambiguous and multiple motivations, the receiver becomes defensive. No one wishes to be a guinea pig, a role player, or an impressed actor, and no one likes to be the victim of some hidden motivation. That which is concealed, also, may appear larger than it really is with the degree of defensiveness of the listener determining the perceived size of the element. The intense reaction of the reading audience to the material in The Hidden Persuaders indicates the prevalence of defensive reactions to multiple motivations behind the strategy. Group members who are seen as "taking a role," as feigning emotion, as toying with their colleagues, as withholding information, or as having special sources of data are especially resented. One participant once complained that another was "using a listening technique" on him!

A large part of the adverse reaction to much of the so-called human relations training is a feeling against what are perceived as gimmicks and tricks to fool or to "involve" people, to make a person think he or she is making their own decision, or to make the listener feel that the sender is genuinely interested in him or her as a person. Particularly violent reactions occur when it appears that someone is trying to make a stratagem appear spontaneous. One person reported a boss who incurred resentment by habitually using the gimmick of "spontaneously" looking at his watch and saying "my gosh, look at the time—I must run to an appointment." The belief was that the boss would create less irritation by honestly asking to be excused.

The aversion to deceit may account for one's resistance to politicians who are suspected of behind-the-scenes planning to get one's vote, to psychologists whose listening apparently is motivated by more than the manifest or content-level interest in one's behavior, or the sophisticated, smooth, or clever person whose one-upmanship is marked with guile. In training groups, the role-flexible person frequently is resented because his or her changes in behavior are perceived as strategic maneuvers.

In contrast, behavior that appears to be spontaneous and free of deception is defense reductive. If the communicator is seen as having a clean id, as having uncomplicated motivations, as being straightforward and honest, as behaving spontaneously in response to the situation, he or she is likely to arouse minimal defensiveness.

NEUTRALITY AND EMPATHY

When neutrality in speech appears to the listener to indicate a lack of concern for his welfare, he becomes defensive. Group members usually desire to be perceived as valued persons, as individuals with special worth, and as objects of concern and affection. The clinical, detached, person-is-an-object-study attitude on the part of many psychologist-trainers is resented by group members. Speech with low affect that communicates little warmth or caring is in such contrast with the affect-laden speech in social situations that it sometimes communicates rejection.

Communication that conveys empathy for the feelings and respect for the worth of the listener, however, is particularly supportive and defense reductive. Reassurance results when a message indicates that the speaker identifies himself or herself with the listener's problems, shares her feelings, and accepts her emotional reactions at face value. Abortive efforts to deny the legitimacy of the

receiver's emotions by assuring the receiver that she need not feel badly, that she should not feel rejected, or that she is overly anxious, although often intended as support giving, may impress the listener as lack of acceptance. The combination of understanding and empathizing with the other person's emotions with no accompanying effort to change him or her is supportive at a high level.

The importance of gestural behavior cues in communicating empathy should be mentioned. Apparently spontaneous facial and bodily evidence of concern is often interpreted as especially valid evidence of deep-level acceptance.

SUPERIORITY AND EQUALITY

When a person communicates to another that he or she feels superior in position, power, wealth, intellectual ability, physical characteristics, or other ways, she or he arouses defensiveness. Here, as with other sources of disturbance, whatever arouses feelings of inadequacy causes the listener to center upon the affect loading of the statement rather than upon the cognitive elements. The receiver then reacts by not hearing the message, by forgetting it, by competing with the sender, or by becoming jealous of him or her.

The person who is perceived as feeling superior communicates that he or she is not willing to enter into a shared problem-solving relationship, that he or she probably does not desire feedback, that he or she does not require help, and/or that he or she will be likely to try to reduce the power, the status, or the worth of the receiver.

Many ways exist for creating the atmosphere that the sender feels himself or herself equal to the listener. Defenses are reduced when one perceives the sender as being willing to enter into participative planning with mutual trust and respect. Differences in talent, ability, worth, appearance, status, and power often exist, but the low defense communicator seems to attach little importance to these distinctions.

CERTAINTY AND PROVISIONALISM

The effects of dogmatism in producing defensiveness are well known. Those who seem to know the answers, to require no additional data, and to regard themselves as teachers rather than as co-workers tend to put others on guard. Moreover, listeners often perceive manifest expressions of certainty as connoting inward feelings of inferiority. They see the dogmatic individual as needing to be right, as wanting to win an argument rather than solve a problem, and as seeing his or her ideas as truths to be defended. This kind of behavior often is associated with acts that others regarded as attempts to exercise control. People who are right seem to have a low tolerance for members who are "wrong"—i.e., who do not agree with the sender.

One reduces the defensiveness of the listener when one communicates that one is willing to experiment with one's own behavior, attitudes, and ideas. The person who appears to be taking provisional attitudes, to be investigating issues rather than taking sides on them, to be problem-solving rather than doubting, and to be willing to experiment and explore tends to communicate that the listener may have some control over the shared quest or the investigation of the ideas. If a person

is genuinely searching for information and data, he or she does not resent help or company along the way.

Review & Reflection Questions

- What is group cohesion? What is the relationship between group cohesion and climate?
- How does symbolic convergence help us understand group cohesion and climate?
- Identify and then compare and contrast a current or former small group that was cohesive and one that was not cohesive. How did the presence or lack of cohesion affect the group's climate?
- Think about a recent group meeting. Can you recognize instances of defensive vs. supportive communication? How have those communication behaviors been affecting your group climate?

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AUTHORS & ATTRIBUTION

The introduction and the section "Defining Group Cohesion and Climate" are adapted from "Small Group Dynamics" in the book *Communication in the Real World* from the University of Minnesota. The book is adapted from a work produced and distributed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA) by a publisher who has requested that they and the original author not receive attribution. This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

The section "Supportive and Defensive Group Climates" is adapted from "Communication, Culture and Organizing" in the book *Organizational Communication* by Julie Zink, Ph.D., and published by

CHAPTER 8.

NAVIGATING GROUP CONFLICT

Learning Objectives

- Define conflict
- Differentiate between functional and dysfunctional conflict
- Recognize various types of conflict in groups
- Describe the conflict process
- Identify and apply strategies for preventing or reducing conflict in groups

Most people probably regard conflict as something to avoid, or at least not something we go looking for. Still, we'd all agree that it's a familiar, perennial, and powerful part of human interaction, including among groups and teams. In this chapter, we will define conflict, consider whether conflict is functional or dysfunctional, discuss the conflict process, and identify strategies for preventing and reducing conflict in groups.

DEFINITIONS OF CONFLICT

Hocker and Wilmot (2001) defined **conflict** as an expressed struggle between interdependent parties over goals which they perceive as incompatible or resources which they perceive to be insufficient. Let's examine the ingredients in their definition.

First of all, conflict must be expressed. If two members of a group dislike each other or disagree with each other's viewpoints but never show those sentiments, there's no conflict.

Second, conflict takes place between or among parties who are interdependent—that is, who need each other to accomplish something. If they can get what they want without each other, they may differ in how they do so, but they won't come into conflict.

Finally, conflict involves clashes over what people want or over the means for them to achieve it. Party

A wants X, whereas party B wants Y. If they either can't both have what they want at all, or they can't each have what they want to the degree that they would prefer to, conflict will arise.

THE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SIDES OF CONFLICT

There are some circumstances in which a moderate amount of conflict can be helpful. For example, conflict can stimulate innovation and change. Conflict can help individuals and group members grow and develop self-identities. As noted by Coser (1956):

> *Conflict, which aims at a resolution of tension between antagonists, is likely to have stabilizing and integrative functions for the relationship. By permitting immediate and direct expression of rival claims, such social systems are able to readjust their structures by eliminating their sources of dissatisfaction. The multiple conflicts which they experience may serve to eliminate the causes for dissociation and to re-establish unity. These systems avail themselves, through the toleration and institutionalization of conflict, of an important stabilizing mechanism.*

Conflict can have negative consequences when people divert energies away from performance and goal attainment and direct them toward resolving the conflict. Continued conflict can take a heavy toll in terms of psychological well-being. Conflict has a major influence on stress and the psychophysical consequences of stress. Finally, continued conflict can also affect the social climate of the group and inhibit group cohesiveness.

While often perceived as negative, some conflicts can actually be productive. (Credit: Arisa Chattasa/Never Give Up for Boxing/Unsplash)

Thus, conflict can be either functional or dysfunctional depending upon the nature of the conflict, its intensity, and its duration. Indeed, both too much and too little conflict can lead to a variety of negative outcomes, as discussed above. This is shown in **Figure 1**. In such circumstances, a moderate amount of conflict may be the best course of action. The issue for groups, therefore, is not how to eliminate conflict but rather how to manage and resolve it when it occurs.

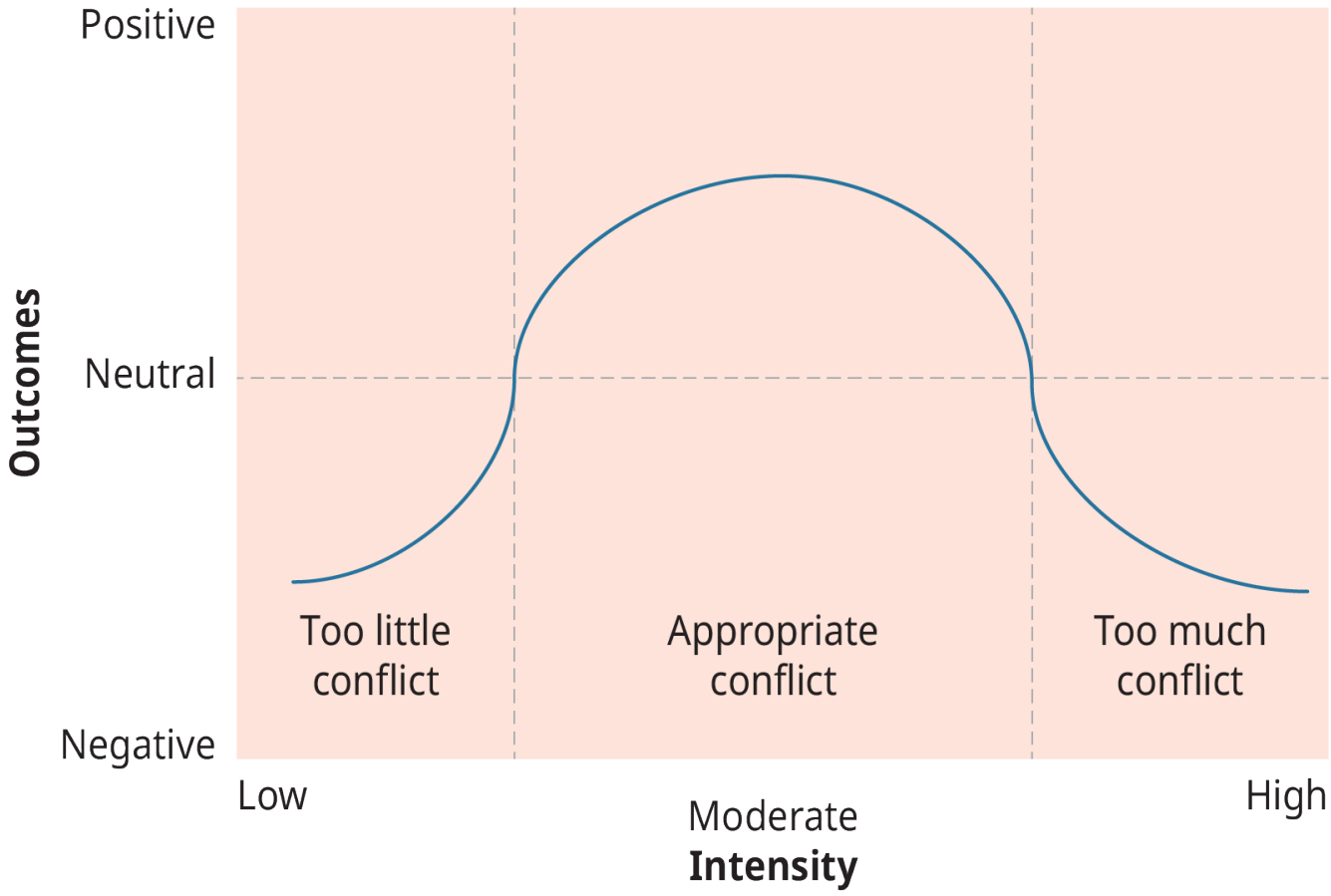

Figure 1: *The Relationship Between Conflict Intensity and Outcomes. Adapted from Brown (1986). (Credit: Rice University/OpenStax/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)*

TYPES OF CONFLICT

Group conflicts may deal with many topics, needs, and elements. Kelly (2006) identified the following five types of conflict:

First, there are **conflicts of substance.** These conflicts, which relate to questions about what choices to make in a given situation, rest on differing views of the facts. If Terry thinks the biology assignment requires an annotated bibliography but Robin believes a simple list of readings will suffice, they're in a conflict of substance. Another term for this kind of conflict is "intrinsic conflict."

Conflicts of value are those in which various parties either hold totally different values or rank the same values in a significantly different order. The famous sociologist Milton Rokeach (1979), for instance, found that freedom and equality constitute values in the four major political systems of the past 100 years—communism, fascism, socialism, and capitalism. What differentiated the systems, however, was the degree to which proponents of each system ranked those two key values. According to Rokeach's analysis, socialism holds both values highly; fascism holds them in low regard; communism values equality over freedom, and capitalism values freedom over equality. As we all know, conflict among proponents of these four political systems preoccupied people and governments for the better part of the twentieth century.

Conflicts of process arise when people differ over how to reach goals or pursue values which they share. How closely should they stick to rules and timelines, for instance, and when should they let their hair down and simply brainstorm new ideas? What about when multiple topics and challenges are intertwined; how and when should the group deal with each one? Another term for these disputes is "task conflicts."

Conflicts of misperceived differences come up when people interpret each other's actions or emotions erroneously. You can probably think of several times in your life when you first thought you disagreed with other people but later found out that you'd just misunderstood something they said and that you actually shared a perspective with them. Or perhaps you attributed a different motive to them than what really underlay their actions. One misconception about conflict, however, is that it always arises from misunderstandings. This isn't the case, however. Robert Doolittle (1976) noted that "some of the most serious conflicts occur among individuals and groups who understand each other very well but who strongly disagree."

The first four kinds of conflict may interact with each other over time, either reinforcing or weakening each other's impact. They may also ebb and flow according to the topics and conditions a group confronts. Even if they're dealt with well, however, further emotional and personal kinds of conflict can occur in a group. **Relationship conflicts,** also known as personality clashes, often involve people's egos and sense of self-worth. Relationship conflicts tend to be particularly difficult to cope with since they frequently aren't admitted for what they are. Many times, they arise in a struggle for superiority or status.

A MODEL OF THE CONFLICT PROCESS

The most commonly accepted model of the conflict process was developed by Kenneth Thomas (1976). This model consists of four stages: (1) frustration, (2) conceptualization, (3) behavior, and (4) outcome.

STAGE 1: FRUSTRATION

As we have seen, conflict situations originate when an individual or group feels frustration in the pursuit of important goals. This frustration may be caused by a wide variety of factors, including disagreement over performance goals, failure to get a promotion or pay raise, a fight over scarce economic resources, new rules or policies, and so forth. In fact, conflict can be traced to frustration over almost anything a group or individual cares about.

STAGE 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION

In stage 2, the conceptualization stage of the model, parties to the conflict attempt to understand the nature of the problem, what they themselves want as a resolution, what they think their opponents want as a resolution, and various strategies they feel each side may employ in resolving the conflict. This stage is really the problem-solving and strategy phase. For instance, when management and union negotiate a labor contract, both sides attempt to decide what is most important and what can be bargained away in exchange for these priority needs.

STAGE 3: BEHAVIOR

The third stage in Thomas's model is actual *behavior*. As a result of the conceptualization process, parties to a conflict attempt to implement their resolution mode by competing or accommodating in the hope of resolving problems. A major task here is determining how best to proceed strategically. That is, what tactics will the party use to attempt to resolve the conflict? Thomas has identified five modes for conflict resolution: (1) competing, (2) collaborating, (3) compromising, (4) avoiding, and (5) accommodating (see **Table 1**).

The choice of an appropriate conflict resolution mode depends to a great extent on the situation and the goals of the party (see **Figure 2**). According to this model, each party must decide the extent to which it is interested in satisfying its own concerns—called assertiveness—and the extent to which it is interested in helping satisfy the opponent's concerns—called cooperativeness. Assertiveness can range from assertive to unassertive on one continuum, and cooperativeness can range from uncooperative to cooperative on the other continuum.

Once the parties have determined their desired balance between the two competing concerns—either consciously or unconsciously—the resolution strategy emerges. For example, if a union negotiator feels confident she can win on an issue that is of primary concern to union members (e.g., wages), a direct competition mode may be chosen (see the upper left-hand corner of **Figure 2**). On the other hand, when the union is indifferent to an issue or when it actually supports management's concerns (e.g., plant safety), we would expect an accommodating or collaborating mode (on the right-hand side of the figure).

Table 1 — Five Modes of Resolving Conflict

Conflict-Handling Modes	Appropriate Situations
Competing	1. When quick, decisive action is vital—e.g., emergencies 2. On important issues where unpopular actions need implementing—e.g., cost-cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline 3. On issues vital to company welfare when you know you're right 4. Against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior
Collaborating	1. When trying to find an integrative solution when both sets of concerns are too important to be compromised 2. When your objective is to learn 3. When merging insights from people with different perspectives 4. When gaining commitment by incorporating concerns into a consensus 5. When working through feelings that have interfered with a relationship
Compromising	1. When goals are important but not worth the effort or potential disruption of more assertive modes 2. When opponents with equal power are committed to mutually exclusive goals 3. When attempting to achieve temporary settlements to complex issues 4. When arriving at expedient solutions under time pressure 5. As a backup when collaboration or competition is unsuccessful
Avoiding	1. When an issue is trivial, or when more important issues are pressing 2. When you perceive no chance of satisfying your concerns 3. When potential disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution 4. When letting people cool down and regain perspective 5. When gathering information supersedes the immediate decision 6. When others can resolve the conflict more effectively 7. When issues seem tangential or symptomatic of other issues
Accommodating	1. When you find you are wrong—to allow a better position to be heard, to learn, and to show your reasonableness 2. When issues are more important to others than yourself—to satisfy others and maintain cooperation 3. When building social credits for later issues 4. When minimizing loss when you are outmatched and losing 5. When harmony and stability are especially important. 6. When allowing subordinates to develop by learning from mistakes.

Source: Adapted from Thomas (1976). *(Credit:* Rice University/OpenStax/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)

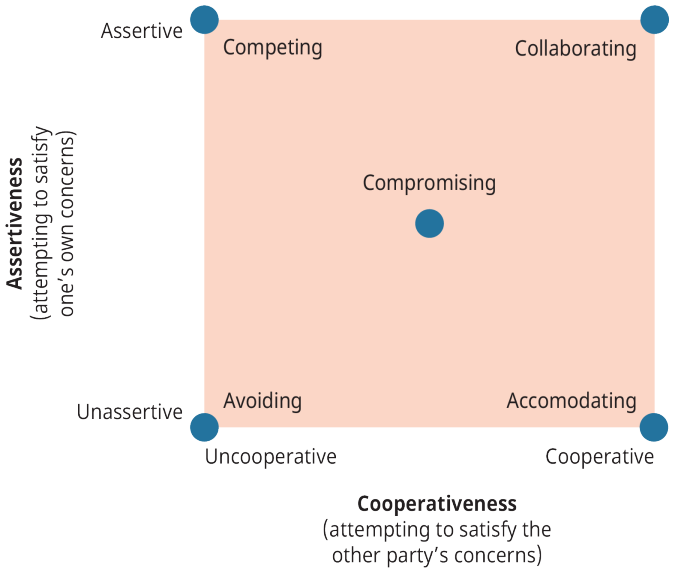

Figure 2: *Approaches to Conflict Resolution. Adapted from Thomas (1976). (Credit: Rice University/OpenStax/CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)*

What is interesting in this process is the assumptions people make about their own modes compared to their opponents'. For example, in one study of executives, it was found that the executives typically described themselves as using collaboration or compromise to resolve conflict, whereas these same executives typically described their opponents as using a competitive mode almost exclusively (Thomas & Pondy, 1967). In other words, the executives underestimated their opponents' concerns as uncompromising. Simultaneously, the executives had flattering portraits of their own willingness to satisfy both sides in a dispute.

Stage 4: Outcome. Finally, as a result of efforts to resolve the conflict, both sides determine the extent to which a satisfactory resolution or outcome has been achieved. Where one party to the conflict does not feel satisfied or feels only partially satisfied, the seeds of discontent are sown for a later conflict, as shown in the preceding figure. One unresolved conflict episode can easily set the stage for a second episode. Action aimed at achieving quick and satisfactory resolution is vital; failure to initiate such action leaves the possibility (more accurately, the probability) that new conflicts will soon emerge.

RECOGNIZING YOUR EMOTIONS

Have you ever seen red, or perceived a situation through rage, anger, or frustration? Then you know that you cannot see or think clearly when you are experiencing strong emotions. There will be times in groups and teams when emotions run high, and your awareness of them can help you clear your mind and choose to wait until the moment has passed to tackle the challenge. This is an example of a time when avoiding can be a useful strategy, at least temporarily.

Emotions can be contagious, and fear of the unknown can influence people to act in irrational ways. The wise communicator can recognize when emotions are on edge in themselves or others, and choose to wait to communicate, problem-solve, or negotiate until after the moment has passed.

Bach and Wyden (1968) discuss **gunnysacking** (or backpacking) as the imaginary bag we all carry, into which we place unresolved conflicts or grievances over time. Holding onto the way things used to be can be like a stone in your gunnysack, and influence how you interpret your current context.

People may be aware of similar issues but might not know your history, and cannot see your backpack

or its contents. For example, if you are used to things one way, and a group member handles them differently, this may cause you some degree of stress and frustration. Bottling up your frustrations only hurts you and can cause your relationships within the group to suffer. By addressing, or unpacking, the stones you carry, you can better assess the current situation with the current patterns and variables.

PREVENTING AND REDUCING CONFLICT

There are many things group members can do to reduce or actually solve dysfunctional conflict when it occurs. These generally fall into two categories: actions directed at conflict *prevention* and actions directed at conflict *reduction.*

STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION

We shall start by examining conflict prevention techniques because preventing conflict is often easier than reducing it once it begins. These include:

1. *Emphasizing group goals and effectiveness.* Focusing on group goals and objectives should prevent goal conflict. If larger goals are emphasized, group members are more likely to see the big picture and work together to achieve corporate goals.
2. *Providing stable, well-structured tasks.* When work activities are clearly defined, understood, and accepted, conflict should be less likely to occur. Conflict is most likely to occur when task uncertainty is high; specifying or structuring roles and tasks minimizes ambiguity.
3. *Facilitating dialogue.* Misperception of the abilities, goals, and motivations of others often leads to conflict, so efforts to increase the dialogue among group members and to share information should help eliminate conflict. As group members come to know more about one another, suspicions often diminish, and greater intergroup teamwork becomes possible.
4. *Avoiding win-lose situations.* If win-lose situations are avoided, less potential for conflict exists.

STRATEGIES FOR CONFLICT REDUCTION

Where dysfunctional conflict already exists, something must be done, and you may pursue one of at least two general approaches: you can try to change *attitudes,* or you can try to *behaviors*. If you change behavior, open conflict is often reduced, but group members may still dislike one another; the conflict simply becomes less visible. Changing attitudes, on the other hand, often leads to fundamental changes in the ways that groups get along. However, it also takes considerably longer to accomplish than behavior change because it requires a fundamental change in social perceptions.

Nine conflict reduction strategies are discussed below. The techniques should be viewed as a continuum, ranging from strategies that focus on changing behaviors near the top of the scale to strategies that focus on changing attitudes near the bottom of the scale.

1. *Physical separation.* The quickest and easiest solution to conflict is physical separation. Separation is useful when conflicting individuals or groups are not working on a joint task or do not need a high degree of interaction. Though this approach does not encourage members to change their attitudes, it does provide time to seek a better accommodation.
2. *Use of rules and regulations.* Conflict can also be reduced through the increasing specification of rules, regulations, and procedures. Again, however, basic attitudes are not modified.
3. *Limiting intergroup interaction.* Another approach to reducing conflict is to limit intergroup interaction to issues involving common goals. Where groups agree on a goal, cooperation becomes easier.
4. *Use of integrators.* Integrators are individuals who are assigned a boundary-spanning role between two people or groups. To be trusted, integrators must be perceived by both groups as legitimate and knowledgeable. The integrator often takes the "shuttle diplomacy" approach, moving from one person or group to another, identifying areas of agreement, and attempting to find areas of future cooperation.
5. *Confrontation and negotiation.* In this approach, competing parties are brought together face-to-face to discuss their basic areas of disagreement. The hope is that through open discussion and negotiation, means can be found to work out problems. Contract negotiations between unions and management represent one such example. If a "win-win" solution can be identified through these negotiations, the chances of an acceptable resolution of the conflict increase.
6. *Third-party consultation.* In some cases, it is helpful to bring in outside consultants for third-party consultation who understand human behavior and can facilitate a resolution. A third-party consultant not only serves as a go-between but can speak more directly to the issues because she is not a member of the group.
7. *Rotation of members.* By rotating from one group to another, individuals come to understand the frames of reference, values, and attitudes of other members; communication is thus increased. When those rotated are accepted by the receiving groups, change in attitudes as well as behavior becomes possible. This is clearly a long-term technique, as it takes time to develop good interpersonal relations and understanding among group members.
8. *Identification of interdependent tasks and superordinate goals.* A further strategy is to establish goals that require groups to work together to achieve overall success.
9. *Use of training.* The final technique on the continuum is training. Outside training experts are retained on a long-term basis to help groups develop relatively permanent mechanisms for working together. Structured workshops and training programs can help forge more favorable intergroup attitudes and, as a result, more constructive group behavior.

Review & Reflection Questions

- Is conflict in groups good or bad? Why?
- Identify the types of conflict and provide examples of each.
- What modes of conflict resolution do you find yourself using when faced with a conflict in a group? What modes have you observed at work in your current group?
- What strategies could you use to prevent or reduce conflict in your group?

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The sections "The Positive and Negative Sides of Conflict," "A Model of the Conflict Process," and "Managing Conflict in Groups" are adapted from Black, J.S., & Bright, D.S. (2019). *Organizational behavior.* OpenStax. https://openstax.org/books/organizational-behavior/. Access the full chapter for free here. The content is available under a Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 license.

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CHAPTER 9.

CONFRONTING AND PREVENTING SOCIAL LOAFING

Learning Outcomes

- Define social loafing
- Identify the causes of social loafing
- Understand how social loafing affects groups and their individual members
- Analyze different factors that affect social loafing behavior
- Describe ways that social loafing can be confronted and prevented

Groups may experience a variety of 'difficult' group members. As discussed in previous chapters, some group members take on roles that distract from the group's tasks or make it difficult for the group to make progress. This chapter will discuss one of the most common of these in more detail — the social loafers. In this chapter, we will discuss the origins of our understanding of social loafing, its causes and effects, and what we know of variations related to culture and gender. This chapter also offers strategies for confronting and preventing social loafing.

DEFINING SOCIAL LOAFING

Social loafing describes the phenomenon that occurs when individuals exert less effort when working as a group than when working independently. Research indicates that there is some degree of social loafing within every group, whether high-functioning or dysfunctional.

Researcher Max Ringlemann identified social loafing in an experiment that involved participants pulling on a rope, similar to the classic game of 'Tug of War' (Credit: Charles Lucas/1904 Tug of War/Public Domain).

In 1913, a French agricultural engineer, Max Ringlemann, identified this social phenomenon. He recognized a collective group performance required less effort by individuals compared to the sum of their individual efforts (Kravitz & Martin, 1986). The effect he noted has been termed the **Ringlemann Effect.** In this experiment, participants pulled on a rope attached to a strain gauge. Ringlemann noted that two individuals pulling the rope only exerted 93% of their individual efforts. A group of three individuals exerted 85% and groups of eight exerted 49% of their combined individual effort. As more individuals pulled on the rope, each individual exerted themselves less. From these observations, Ringlemann determined that individuals perform below their potential when working in a group (LaFasto & Larson, 2001).

Since Ringlemann's observation, social loafing has been identified in numerous studies. Social loafing has several causes and effects that will be discussed in this document, as well as methods for dealing with social loafing to promote more effective group work. "Ringleman's brainchild of social loafing has now been used within a diverse variety of studies, ranging from its impact on sports teams to the effects on groups within huge conglomerates" (Patel, 2002, p. 124).

CAUSES OF SOCIAL LOAFING

Many theories explain why social loafing occurs, below are several explanations of social loafing causes:

- **Equitable contribution:** Team members believe that others are not putting forth as much effort as themselves. Since they feel that the others in the group are slacking, they lessen their efforts too. This causes a downward cycle that ends at the point where only the minimum amount of work is performed.
- **Submaximal goal setting:** Team members may perceive that with a well-defined goal and with several people working towards it, they can work less for it. The task then becomes optimizing rather than maximizing.
- **Lessened contingency between input and outcome:** Team members may feel they can hide in the crowd and avoid the consequences of not contributing. Or, a team member may feel lost in the crowd and unable to gain recognition for their contributions (Latane, 1998). This

description is characteristic of people driven by their uniqueness and individuality. In a group, they lose this individuality and the recognition that comes with their contributions. Therefore, these group members lose motivation to offer their full ability since it will not be acknowledged (Charbonnier et al., 1998). Additionally, large group sizes can cause individuals to feel lost in the crowd. With so many individuals contributing, some may feel that their efforts are not needed or will not be recognized (Kerr, 1989).

- **Lack of evaluation:** Loafing begins or is strengthened in the absence of an individual evaluation structure imposed by the environment (Price & Harrison, 2006). This occurs because working in a group environment results in less self-awareness (Mullen, 1983). For example, a member of a sales team will loaf when sales of the group are measured rather than individual sales efforts.
- **Unequal distribution of compensation:** In the workplace, compensation comes in monetary forms and promotions, and in academics, it is in the form of grades or positive feedback. If individuals believe compensation has not been allotted equally amongst group members, they will withdraw their individual efforts (Piezon & Donaldson, 2005).
- **Non-cohesive group**: A group functions effectively when members have bonded and created high-quality relationships. If the group is not cohesive, members are more prone to social loafing since they are not concerned about letting down their teammates (Piezon & Donaldson, 2005).

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL LOAFING

Regardless of why someone might engage in social loafing, it can negatively impact groups and individuals. (Credit: Viktor Hanacek/Man Relaxing With Legs Up/Picjumbo)

Social loafing engenders negative consequences that affect both the group as a whole as well as the individual.

EFFECTS ON GROUPS

As explained in the Ringlemann Effect, output decreases with increased group membership, due to social loafing. This effect is demonstrated in another study by Latane, et al. (1979). In this experiment, subjects were asked to yell or clap as loudly as possible. As in Ringlemann's study, the overall loudness increased while individual output decreased. People averaged 3.7 dynes/sq cm individually, 2.6 in pairs, 1.8 in a group of four, and 1.5 in a group of six. In this study, there was no block effect (indicating tiredness or lack of practice). Due to social loafing, the average output for each individual decreases due to the perception that others in the group are not putting forth as much effort as the individual.

In considering this first experiment, some individuals suggested that results might be invalid due to acoustics (i.e., voices canceling each other out or voices not synchronized). To disprove this theory, another experiment was performed. For this study, participants were placed in individual rooms and wore headphones. In repeated trials, these participants were told they were either shouting alone or

as part of a group. The results demonstrated the same trend as in the first experiment–individual performance decreased as group size increased (Latane, 1979).

In reality, there are not many groups with the objective of yelling loud, however, the example above illustrates a principle that is common in business, family, education, and in social gatherings that harms the overall integrity and performance of a team by reducing the level of output, one individual at a time. The negative social cues involved with social loafing produce decreased group performance (Schnake, 1991). Reasonable consequences of social loafing also include dissatisfaction with group members who fail to contribute equally and the creation of in-groups and out-groups. Additionally, groups will lack the talents that could be offered by those who choose to not contribute. All of these factors result in less productivity.

EFFECTS ON INDIVIDUALS

The preceding section identifies the effect of social loafing on a group which is arguably the most prominent consequence of the group behavior. However, social loafing also has an impact on the individuals that comprise the group. There are various side effects that individuals may experience.

One potential side effect is the lack of satisfaction that a member of the group might experience, thereby becoming disappointed or depressed at the end of the project. When a member of a group becomes a social loafer, the member reduces any opportunity he might have had to grow in his ability and knowledge. Today, many college-level classes focus on group projects. The ability for an individual to participate in social loafing increases as the group increases in number. However, if these groups remain small the individual will not have the opportunity to become invisible to the group and their lack of input will be readily evident. The lack of identifiability in a group is a psychological production that has been documented in several studies (Carron, Burke & Prapavessis, 2004).

Social loafing can also negatively impact individuals in the group who perform the bulk of the work. For example, in schoolwork teams are often comprised of children of varying capacities. Without individual accountability, often only one or a few group members will do most of the work to make up for what the other students lack. Cheri Yecke (2004), Minnesota's commissioner of education, explains that in these instances group work can be detrimental to the student(s) who feel resentment and frustration from carrying the weight of the work. Yecke (2004) recounted an experience of one child who felt she had to "slow down the pace of her learning and that she could not challenge the group, or she would be punished" with a lower grade than desired. Especially in situations where members of the group of differing abilities, social loafing negatively affects group members who carry the weight of the group.

VARIATION IN SOCIAL LOAFING

Researchers have suggested there may be variation in social loafing by culture and gender, although further research is needed.

CULTURE

Social loafing is more likely to occur in societies where the focus is on the individual rather than the

group. This phenomenon was observed in a study comparing American managers (**individualistic values**) to Chinese managers (**collectivistic values**). Researchers found that social loafing occurred with the American managers while there was no such occurrence with the Chinese managers. The researchers explained this through a comparison between collectivistic and individualistic orientations.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, collectivistic orientation places group goals and collective action ahead of self-interests. This reinforces the participants' desires to pursue group goals to benefit the group. People from this orientation view their individual actions as an important contribution to the group's well-being. They also gain satisfaction and feelings of accomplishment from group outcomes. Further, collectivists anticipate that other group members will contribute to the groups' performance and so they choose to do the same in return. They view their contributions to group accomplishments as important and role-defined (Earley, 1989).

In contrast, an individualist's motive is focused on self-interest. Actions by these individuals emphasize personal gain and rewards based on their particular accomplishments. An individualist anticipates rewards contingent on individual performance. Contribution toward achieving collective goals is inconsistent with the self-interest motive unless differential awards are made by the group. Individuals whose contributions to group output go unnoticed have little incentive to contribute since they can "loaf" without fear of consequences. As a result, an individualist can maximize personal gain without putting forth as much effort as had he/she done the work individually. The self-interest motive stresses individual outcomes and gain over the collective good (Earley, 1989).

GENDER

The few studies that have looked at gender and social loafing have recorded different levels of social loafing between men and women, with men more inclined to social loaf than women (Kerr, 1983, Kugihara, 1999; Stark, Shaw, & Duff, 2007). Some have suggested that due to the ways they have been socialized women tend to be more inclined to sustain group cohesion where men are more interested in task achievement. As a result, women, who deem collective tasks more significant than individual tasks, are less likely to engage in social loafing than men. This phenomenon is demonstrated in a study conducted by Naoki Kugihara (1999). To determine the social loafing effect on men versus women, he had 18 Japanese men and 18 Japanese women pull on a rope, similar to the Ringlemann experiment. On the questionnaire, several participants indicated their perception that they pulled with their full strength. However, Kugihara (1999) observed the men did decrease their effort once involved in collective rope pulling. Conversely, the women did not show a change in effort once involved collectively. Stark, Shaw, and Duff (2007) found consistent differences in social loafing by gender in both self and peer-evaluations among U.S. college students, with those identifying as women reporting lower levels of social loafing. They call for further research to understand the role of gender in social loafing.

CONFRONTING THE SOCIAL LOAFER

No one ever likes to be confronted or told what to do. So in a group setting, what is the best way to make the most out of each individual's contributions? Especially in groups where there is no

designated leader, it is difficult for one group member to confront another. However, Rothwell (2004) offers advice for handling these situations:

- **Private consultation:** The team leader or a selected team member should consult the social loafer individually. This individual should solicit the reasons for the perceived lack of effort. Perhaps there may be more going on than may be apparent at first glance. Additionally, the loafer should be encouraged to participate and understand the importance of his or her contributions.
- **Group discussion:** The entire group can address the problem to the dissenting team member and specifically address the problem(s) they have observed. They should attempt to resolve the problem and refrain from deleterious attacks on the individual. Revisiting a group contract and making changes or adjustments to that contract may be a way to build new structures that better support the group and the individual.
- **Superior assistance:** After trying to address the problem with the individual both privately and as a group, group members should seek the advice of a superior, whether it be a teacher, boss, or another authority figure. Where possible, group members should provide documented evidence of the loafing engaged by the individual (De Vita, 2001). The person in authority can directly address the problem with the team member or serve in a mediating role between members.
- **Exclusion:** The loafer should only be booted out of the group as a last resort. However, this option may not be feasible in some instances.
- **Circumvention:** If all the above steps have been attempted without result, then the group can reorganize tasks and responsibilities. This should be done in a manner that will result in a desirable outcome whether or not the loafer contributes (Rothwell, 2004).

PREVENTING SOCIAL LOAFING

To prevent or limit the effects of social loafing, there are several guidelines a team might initiate to manage team members' efforts toward team goals. Though some do depend upon the nature of the team and the type of team, most of these guidelines can be adapted to provide a positive benefit to all teams. You will find that most of them should sound familiar by this point.

- **Write a team contract:** Confusion and miscommunication can cause social loafing. Although it may seem formal, writing a team contract is a good first step in setting group rules and preventing social loafing. This contract should include several important pieces of information such as group expectations, individual responsibilities, forms of group communication, and methods of discipline. If each group member has a measurable responsibility that they alone are accountable for, the member is not able to rely on the group for his portion of responsibility. Setting rules at the beginning will help all team members achieve the team objectives and performance goals. Establishing ground rules can help to prevent social loafing and free-riding behaviors by providing assurances that free-riding attempts will be dealt with (Cox & Brobrowski, 2000). Be sure to discuss the consequences of not following rules and the process to call an individual on their negative behavior.

- **Create appropriate group sizes:** Whenever possible, minimize the number of people within a group. The fewer people available to diffuse responsibility to, the less likely social loafing will occur. Also, do not create or allow a team to undertake a two-man job. For example, municipal maintenance crews might have crew members standing around watching one or two individuals work. Does that job really require that many crew members?
- **Establish individual accountability:** This is critical for initial assignments that set the stage for the rest of the task. Tasks that require pre-work and input from all group members produce a set of dynamics that largely prevent social loafing from happening in the first place. If this expectation is set early, individuals will avoid the consequences of being held accountable for poor work.
- **Specifically define the task:** Clarify the importance of the task to the team and assign members to do particular assignments. Establish expectations through specific measurable and observable outcomes, such as due dates. At the end of each meeting, refresh everyone's memories as to who is required to do what by when and offer clarification on required duties.
- **Create personal relationships:** Provide opportunities for members to socialize and establish trusting relationships. Dedicated relationships cause people to fulfill their duties more efficiently.
- **Manage discussions:** Ensure that all team members have the opportunity to speak. Make every individual feel they have a valuable role on the team and their input is important to group success.
- **Engage individuals:** When intrinsic involvement in the task is high, workers may feel that their efforts are very important for the success of the group and thus may be unlikely to engage in social loafing even if the task visibility is low.
- **Highlight achievement:** Open or close meetings by summarizing members' and the group's successes. Create a culture that recognizes and celebrates "wins" and task accomplishments.
- **Evaluate progress:** Meet individually with team members to assess their successes and areas of improvement. Discuss ways in which the team may provide additional support so the task may be completed. When possible, develop an evaluation based on an individual contribution. This can be accomplished through individual group members' peer evaluations of others on the team.

Review & Reflection Questions

- Why do group members engage in social loafing?
- Discuss past experiences with social loafing. What effects did it have on your group?
- What could you do in current and future groups to prevent social loafing?

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CHAPTER 10.

MAKING DECISIONS IN GROUPS

Learning Objectives

- Understand the pros and cons of individual and group decision-making
- Compare and contrast different group decision-making methods
- Describe strategies for reaching consensus
- Recognize the signs of groupthink

When it comes to decision-making, are two heads better than one? The answer to this question depends on several factors. In this chapter, we will discuss the advantages and drawbacks of group decision-making and identify different methods for making decisions as a group. We will also offer strategies for reaching consensus and address one of the common flaws in group decision-making — groupthink.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

Group decision-making has the advantage of drawing from the experiences and perspectives of a larger number of individuals. Hence, the ideas have the potential to be more creative and lead to a more effective decision. In fact, groups may sometimes achieve results beyond what they could have done as individuals. Groups also make the task more enjoyable for members in question. Finally, when the decision is made by a group rather than a single individual, implementation of the decision will be easier because group members will be invested in the decision. If the group is diverse, better decisions may be made because different group members may have different ideas based on their backgrounds and experiences. Research shows that for top management teams, groups that debate issues and that are diverse make decisions that are more comprehensive and better for the bottom line in terms of profitability and sales (Simons et al., 1999).

[1]Despite its popularity within organizations, group decision-making suffers from a number of disadvantages. While groups have the potential to arrive at an effective decision, they often suffer

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from process losses (Miner, 1984). For example, groups may suffer from coordination problems. Anyone who has worked with a team of individuals on a project can attest to the difficulty of coordinating members' work or even coordinating everyone's presence in a team meeting. Furthermore, groups can suffer from social loafing, as discussed previously. Groups may also suffer from groupthink, the tendency to avoid critical evaluation of ideas the group favors, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Finally, group decision-making takes a longer time compared with individual decision-making, given that all members need to discuss their thoughts regarding different alternatives.

Thus, whether an individual or a group decision is preferable will depend on the specifics of the situation. For example, if there is an emergency and a decision needs to be made quickly, individual decision-making might be preferred. Individual decision-making may also be appropriate if the individual in question has all the information needed to make the decision and if implementation problems are not expected. However, if one person does not have all the information and skills needed to make the decision, if implementing the decision will be difficult without the involvement of those who will be affected by the decision, and if time urgency is more modest, then decision-making by a group may be more effective.

METHODS OF MAKING GROUP DECISIONS

Research does indicate that groups generate more ideas and make more accurate decisions on matters for which a known preferred solution exists, but they also operate more slowly than individuals (Hoy et al., 1982). Under time pressure and other constraints, some group leaders exercise their power to make a decision unilaterally—alone—because they're willing to sacrifice a degree of accuracy for the sake of speed. Sometimes this behavior turns out to be wise; sometimes it doesn't.

Assuming that a group determines that it must reach a decision together on some matter, rather than deferring to the will of a single person, it can proceed according to several methods. Parker and Hoffman (2006), along with Hartley and Dawson (2010), place decision-making procedures in several categories. Here is a synthesis of their views of how decision-making can take place:

"A PLOP"

A group may conduct a discussion in which members express views and identify alternatives but then reach no decision and take no action. When people go their own ways after such a "plop," things sometimes take care of themselves, and the lack of a decision causes no difficulties. On the other hand, if a group ignores or postpones a decision that really needs attention, its members may confront tougher decisions later—some of which may deal with problems brought about by not addressing a topic when it was at an early stage.

DELEGATION TO AN EXPERT

In some cases, groups may make a **decision by expert.** A group may not be ready to make a decision at a given time, either because it lacks sufficient information or is experiencing unresolved conflict among members with differing views. In such a situation, the group may not want to simply drop the matter and move on. Instead, it may turn to one of its members who everyone feels has the expertise

to choose wisely among the alternatives that the group is considering. The group may also turn to an outside expert, someone who is external to the group who may be able to provide guidance. The group can either ask the expert to come back later with a final proposal or simply allow the person to make the decision alone after having gathered whatever further information he or she feels is necessary.

AVERAGING

Group members may shift their individual stances regarding a question by "splitting the difference" to reach a "middle ground." This technique tends to work most easily if numbers are involved. For instance, a group trying to decide how much money to spend on a gift for a departing member might ask everyone for a preferred amount and agree to spend whatever is computed by averaging those amounts.

VOTING

If you need to be quick and definitive in making a decision, voting is probably the best method. Everyone in mainstream American society is familiar with the process, for one thing, and its outcome is inherently clear and obvious. A **majority vote** requires that more than half of a group's members vote for a proposal, whereas a proposal subject to a two-thirds vote will not pass unless twice as many members show support as those who oppose it.

Voting is essentially a win/lose activity. You can probably remember a time when you or someone else in a group composed part of a strong and passionate minority whose desires were thwarted because of the results of a vote. How much commitment did you feel to support the results of that vote?

Voting does offer a quick and simple way to reach decisions, but it works better in some situations than in others. If the members of a group see no other way to overcome a deadlock, for instance, voting may make sense. Likewise, very large groups and those facing serious time constraints may see advantages to voting. Finally, the efficiency of voting is appealing when it comes to making routine or noncontroversial decisions that need only to be officially approved.

CONSENSUS

Consensus is another decision-making rule that groups may use when the goal is to gain support for an idea or plan of action. While consensus tends to take longer in the first place, it may make sense when support is needed to enact the plan. The process works by discussing the issues, generating a proposal, calling for consensus, and discussing any concerns. If concerns still exist, the proposal is modified to accommodate them. These steps are repeated until consensus is reached. Thus, this decision-making rule is inclusive, participatory, cooperative, and democratic. Research shows that consensus can lead to better accuracy (Roch, 2007), and it helps members feel greater satisfaction with decisions (Mohammed & Ringseis, 2001) and to have greater acceptance. However, groups take longer with this approach, and groups that cannot reach consensus become frustrated (Peterson, 1999). [2]

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While it can be challenging and time-consuming, consensus is considered to be the most ideal method of decision-making. (Clay Banks/We Are Better When We are United/Unsplash)

Consensus should not be confused with **unanimity**, which means only that no one has explicitly stated objections to a proposal or decision. Although unanimity can certainly convey an accurate perspective of a group's views at times, groupthink, as discussed below, also often leads to unanimous decisions. Therefore, it's probably wise to be cautious when a group of diverse people seems to have formed a totally unified bloc with respect to choices among controversial alternatives.

When a consensus decision is reached through a full interchange of views and is then adopted in good faith by all parties to a discussion, it can energize and motivate a group. Besides avoiding the win/lose elements intrinsic to voting, it converts each member's investment in a decision into a stake in preserving and promoting the decision after it has been agreed upon.

Guidelines for Seeking Consensus

How can a group actually go about working toward consensus? Here are some guidelines for the process:

- **First, be sure everyone knows the definition of consensus and is comfortable with observing them.** For many group members, this may mean suspending judgment and trying

something they've never done before. Remind people that consensus requires a joint dedication to moving forward toward improvement in and by the group.

- **Second, endeavor to solicit participation by every member of the group.** Even the naturally quietest person should be actively "polled" from time to time for his or her perspectives. In fact, it's a good idea to take special pains to ask for varied viewpoints when discussion seems to be stalled or contentious.
- **Third, listen honestly and openly to each group member's viewpoints.** Attempt to seek and gather information from others. Do your best to subdue your emotions and your tendency to judge and evaluate.
- **Fourth, be patient.** Reaching consensus often takes much more time than voting would. A premature "agreement" reached because people give in to speed things up or avoid conflict is likely later to weaken or fall apart.
- **Fifth, always look for mutually acceptable ways to make it through challenging circumstances.** Don't resort to chance mechanisms like flipping a coin, and don't trade decisions arbitrarily just so that things come out equally for people who remain committed to opposing views.
- **Sixth, resolve gridlock earnestly.** Stop and ask, "Have we really identified every possible feasible way that our group might act?" If members of a group simply can't agree on one alternative, see if they can all find and accept the next-best option. Then be sure to request an explicit statement from them that they are prepared to genuinely commit themselves to that option.

One variation on consensus decision-making calls upon a group's leader to ask its members, before initiating a discussion, to agree to a *deadline* and a *"safety valve."* The deadline would be a time by which everyone in the group feels they need to have reached a decision. The "safety valve" would be a statement that any member can veto the will of the rest of the group to act in a certain way, but only if he or she takes responsibility for moving the group forward in some other positive direction.

Although consensus entails full participation and assent within a group, it usually can't be reached without guidance from a leader. One college president we knew was a master at escorting his executive team to consensus. Without coercing or rushing them, he would regularly involve them all in discussions and lead their conversations to a point at which everyone was nodding in agreement, or at least conveying acceptance of a decision. Rather than leaving things at that point, however, the president would generally say, "We seem to have reached a decision to do XYZ. Is there anyone who objects?" Once people had this last opportunity to add further comments of their own, the group could move forward with a sense that it had a common vision in mind.

Consensus decision-making is easiest within groups whose members know and respect each other, whose authority is more or less evenly distributed, and whose basic values are shared. Some charitable and religious groups meet these conditions and have long been able to use consensus decision-making as a matter of principle. The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, began using consensus as early as the 17th century. Its affiliated international service agency, the American Friends Service

Committee, employs the same approach. The Mennonite Church has also long made use of consensus decision-making.

GROUPTHINK

Have you ever been in a decision-making group that you felt was heading in the wrong direction, but you didn't speak up and say so? If so, you have already been a victim of groupthink. **Groupthink** is a group pressure phenomenon that increases the risk of the group making flawed decisions by leading to reduced mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment. According to Janis (1972), groupthink is characterized by eight symptoms that include:

1. *Illusion of invulnerability* shared by most or all of the group members creates excessive optimism and encourages them to take extreme risks.
2. *Collective rationalizations* where members downplay negative information or warnings that might cause them to reconsider their assumptions.
3. *An unquestioned belief in the group's inherent morality* may incline members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their actions.
4. *Stereotyped views of out-groups* are seen when groups discount rivals' abilities to make effective responses.
5. *Direct pressure* on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group's stereotypes, illusions, or commitments.

Avoiding groupthink can be a matter of life or death. In January 1986, the space shuttle Challenger exploded 73 seconds after liftoff, killing all seven astronauts aboard. The decision to launch the Challenger that day, despite problems with mechanical components of the vehicle and unfavorable weather conditions, is cited as an example of groupthink. (Credit: NASA/Challenger flight 51-l crew/Public Domain)

6. *Self-censorship* is when members of the group minimize their own doubts and counterarguments.
7. *Illusion of unanimity* is based on self-censorship and direct pressure on the group; the lack of dissent is viewed as unanimity.
8. *The emergence of self-appointed mindguards* where one or more members protect the group from information that runs counter to the group's assumptions and course of action.

Groups do tend to be more likely to suffer from symptoms of groupthink when they are large and when the group is cohesive because the members like each other (Esser, 1998; Mullen et al., 1994). The assumption is that the more frequently a group displays one or more of the eight symptoms, the worse the quality of their decisions will be. However, if your group is cohesive, it is not necessarily doomed to engage in groupthink.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AVOIDING GROUPTHINK

The following are strategies for avoiding groupthink:

Groups Should:

- Discuss the symptoms of groupthink and how to avoid them.
- Assign a rotating devil's advocate to every meeting.
- Invite experts or qualified colleagues who are not part of the core decision-making group to attend meetings, and get reactions from outsiders regularly and share these with the group.
- Encourage a culture of difference where different ideas are valued.
- Debate the ethical implications of the decisions and potential solutions being considered.

Individuals Should:

- Monitor their own behavior for signs of groupthink and modify behavior if needed.
- Check themselves for self-censorship.
- Carefully avoid mindguard behaviors.
- Avoid putting pressure on other group members to conform.
- Remind members of the ground rules for avoiding groupthink if they get off track.

Group Leaders Should:

- Break the group into two subgroups from time to time.
- Have more than one group work on the same problem if time and resources allow it. This makes sense for highly critical decisions.
- Remain impartial and refrain from stating preferences at the outset of decisions.
- Set a tone of encouraging critical evaluations throughout deliberations.
- Create an anonymous feedback channel where all group members can contribute if desired.

Review & Reflection Questions

- Do you prefer to make decisions in a group or alone? What are the main reasons for your preference?
- What decision-making methods have you used before in groups? What have been the advantages and disadvantages of those methods?
- Have you been in a group that experienced groupthink? If so, how did you deal with it?
- What strategies might you use in your groups to combat groupthink?

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CHAPTER 11.

ENGAGING IN GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING

Learning Objectives

- Discuss the common components and characteristics of problems
- Explain the five steps of the group problem-solving process

Although the steps of problem-solving and decision-making that we will discuss next may seem obvious, we often don't think to or choose not to use them. Instead, we start working on a problem and later realize we are lost and have to backtrack. I'm sure we've all reached a point in a project or task and had the "OK, now what?" moment. I've recently taken up some carpentry projects as a functional hobby, and I have developed a great respect for the importance of advanced planning. It's frustrating to get to a crucial point in building or fixing something only to realize that you have to unscrew a support board that you already screwed in, have to drive back to the hardware store to get something that you didn't think to get earlier, or have to completely start over. In this section, we will discuss group problem-solving and important steps in the process.

GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING

The **problem-solving process** involves thoughts, discussions, actions, and decisions that occur from the first consideration of a problematic situation to the goal. The problems that groups face are varied, but some common problems include budgeting funds, raising funds, planning events, addressing customer or citizen complaints, creating or adapting products or services to fit needs, supporting members, and raising awareness about issues or causes.

According to Adams and Galanes (2009), problems of all sorts have three common components:

1. **An undesirable situation.** When conditions are desirable, there isn't a problem.
2. **The desired situation.** Even though it may only be a vague idea, there is a drive to better the undesirable situation. The vague idea may develop into a more precise goal that can be achieved, although solutions are not yet generated.

3. **Obstacles between undesirable and desirable situations.** These are things that stand in the way between the current situation and the group's goal of addressing it. This component of a problem requires the most work, and it is the part where decision-making occurs. Some examples of obstacles include limited funding, resources, personnel, time, or information. Obstacles can also take the form of people who are working against the group, including people resistant to change or people who disagree.

Discussion of these three elements of a problem helps the group tailor its problem-solving process, as each problem will vary. While these three general elements are present in each problem, the group should also address specific characteristics of the problem. Five common and important characteristics to consider are task difficulty, the number of possible solutions, group member interest in the problem, group member familiarity with the problem, and the need for solution acceptance (Adams & Galanes, 2009).

1. **Task difficulty.** Difficult tasks are also typically more complex. Groups should be prepared to spend time researching and discussing difficult and complex tasks to develop a shared foundational knowledge. This typically requires individual work outside of the group and frequent group meetings to share information.
2. **Number of possible solutions.** There are usually multiple ways to solve a problem or complete a task, but some problems have more potential solutions than others. Figuring out how to prepare a beach house for an approaching hurricane is fairly complex and difficult, but there are still a limited number of things to do—for example, taping and boarding up windows; turning off water, electricity, and gas; trimming trees; and securing loose outside objects. Other problems may be more creatively based. For example, designing a new restaurant may entail using some standard solutions but could also entail many different types of innovation with layout and design.
3. **Group member interest in problem.** When group members are interested in the problem, they will be more engaged with the problem-solving process and invested in finding a quality solution. Groups with high interest in and knowledge about the problem may want more freedom to develop and implement solutions, while groups with low interest may prefer a leader who provides structure and direction.
4. **Group familiarity with problem.** Some groups encounter a problem regularly, while other problems are more unique or unexpected. A family who has lived in hurricane alley for decades probably has a better idea of how to prepare their house for a hurricane than does a family that just recently moved from the Midwest. Many groups that rely on funding have to revisit a budget every year, and in recent years, groups have had to get more creative with budgets as funding has been cut in nearly every sector. When group members aren't familiar with a problem, they will need to do background research on what similar groups have done and may also need to bring in outside experts.
5. **Need for solution acceptance.** In this step, groups must consider how many people the decision will affect and how much "buy-in" from others the group needs for their solution to be successfully implemented. Some small groups have many stakeholders on whom the success of a solution depends. Other groups are answerable only to themselves. When a small

group is planning on building a new park in a crowded neighborhood or implementing a new policy in a large business, it can be very difficult to develop solutions that will be accepted by all. In such cases, groups will want to poll those who will be affected by the solution and may want to do a pilot implementation to see how people react. Imposing an excellent solution that doesn't have buy-in from stakeholders can still lead to failure.

GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESS

There are several variations of similar problem-solving models based on American scholar John Dewey's **reflective thinking process** (Bormann & Bormann, 1988). As you read through the steps in the process, think about how you can apply what you learned regarding the general and specific elements of problems. Some of the following steps are straightforward, and they are things we would logically do when faced with a problem. However, taking a deliberate and systematic approach to problem-solving has been shown to benefit group functioning and performance. A deliberate approach is especially beneficial for groups that do not have an established history of working together and will only be able to meet occasionally. Although a group should attend to each step of the process, group leaders or other group members who facilitate problem-solving should be cautious not to dogmatically follow each element of the process or force a group along. Such a lack of flexibility could limit group member input and negatively affect the group's cohesion and climate.

STEP 1: DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Define the problem by considering the three elements shared by every problem: the current undesirable situation, the goal or more desirable situation, and obstacles in the way (Adams & Galanes, 2009). At this stage, group members share what they know about the current situation, without proposing solutions or evaluating the information. Here are some good questions to ask during this stage:

- What is the current difficulty?
- How did we come to know that the difficulty exists?
- Who/what is involved?
- Why is it meaningful/urgent/important?
- What have the effects been so far?
- What, if any, elements of the difficulty require clarification?

At the end of this stage, the group should be able to compose a single sentence that summarizes the problem called a problem statement. Avoid wording in the problem statement or question that hints at potential solutions. A small group formed to investigate ethical violations of city officials could use the following problem statement: "Our state does not currently have a mechanism for citizens to report suspected ethical violations by city officials."

STEP 2: ANALYZE THE PROBLEM

During this step, a group should analyze the problem and the group's relationship to the problem.

Whereas the first step involved exploring the "what" related to the problem, this step focuses on the "why." At this stage, group members can discuss the potential causes of the difficulty. Group members may also want to begin setting out an agenda or timeline for the group's problem-solving process, looking forward to the other steps.

To fully analyze the problem, the group can discuss the five common problem variables discussed before. Here are two examples of questions that the group formed to address ethics violations might ask: Why doesn't our city have an ethics reporting mechanism? Do cities of similar size have such a mechanism? Once the problem has been analyzed, the group can pose a problem question that will guide the group as it generates possible solutions. "How can citizens report suspected ethical violations of city officials and how will such reports be processed and addressed?" As you can see, the problem question is more complex than the problem statement, since the group has moved on to a more in-depth discussion of the problem during step 2.

STEP 3: GENERATE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

During this step, group members generate possible solutions to the problem. This is where brainstorming techniques to enhance creativity may be useful to the group (see earlier chapter on "Enhancing Creativity"). Again, solutions should not be evaluated at this point, only proposed and clarified. The question should be what *could* we do to address this problem, not what *should* we do to address it. It is perfectly OK for a group member to question another person's idea by asking something like "What do you mean?" or "Could you explain your reasoning more?" Discussions at this stage may reveal a need to return to previous steps to better define or more fully analyze a problem. Since many problems are multifaceted, group members must generate solutions for each part of the problem separately, making sure to have multiple solutions for each part. Stopping the solution-generating process prematurely can lead to groupthink.

Groups might use visualization techniques to generate ideas. Using a whiteboard to map out ideas can be a useful strategy for groups. (Credit: Christina Morillo/Woman in black coat/Pexels)

For the problem question previously posed, the group would need to generate solutions for all three parts of the problem included in the question. Possible solutions for the first part of the problem (How can citizens report ethical violations?) may include "online reporting system, e-mail, in-person, anonymously, on-the-record," and so on. Possible solutions for the second part of the problem (How will reports be processed?) may include "daily by a newly appointed ethics officer, weekly by a nonpartisan non-government employee," and so on. Possible solutions for the third part of the problem (How will reports be addressed?) may include "by a newly appointed ethics commission, by the accused's supervisor, by the city manager," and so on.

STEP 4: EVALUATE SOLUTIONS

During this step, solutions can be critically evaluated based on their credibility, completeness, and worth. Once the potential solutions have been narrowed based on more obvious differences in relevance and/or merit, the group should analyze each solution based on its potential effects—especially negative effects. Groups that are required to report the rationale for their decision or whose decisions may be subject to public scrutiny would be wise to make a set list of criteria for evaluating each solution. Additionally, solutions can be evaluated based on how well they fit with the group's charge and the abilities of the group. To do this, group members may ask, "Does this solution live up to the original purpose or mission of the group?" and "Can the solution actually be implemented with our current resources and connections?" and "How will this solution be supported,

funded, enforced, and assessed?" Conflict may emerge during this step of problem-solving, and group members will need to employ effective critical thinking and listening skills.

Decision-making is part of the larger process of problem-solving and it plays a prominent role in this step. While there are several fairly similar models for problem-solving, there are many varied decision-making techniques that groups can use (see earlier chapter on "Decision-Making in Groups"). For example, to narrow the list of proposed solutions, group members may decide by majority vote, by weighing the pros and cons, or by discussing them until a consensus is reached. There are also more complex decision-making models like the "six hats method," which we will discuss later. Once the final decision is reached, the group leader or facilitator should confirm that the group is in agreement. It may be beneficial to let the group break for a while or even to delay the final decision until a later meeting to allow people time to evaluate it outside of the group context.

STEP 5: IMPLEMENT AND ASSESS THE SOLUTION

Implementing the solution requires some advanced planning, and it should not be rushed unless the group is operating under strict time restraints or delay may lead to some kind of harm. Although some solutions can be implemented immediately, others may take days, months, or years. As was noted earlier, it may be beneficial for groups to poll those who will be affected by the solution as to their opinion of it or even do a pilot test to observe the effectiveness of the solution and how people react to it. Before implementation, groups should also determine how and when they would assess the effectiveness of the solution by asking, "How will we know if the solution is working or not?" Since solution assessment will vary based on whether or not the group is disbanded, groups should also consider the following questions: If the group disbands after implementation, who will be responsible for assessing the solution? If the solution fails, will the same group reconvene or will a new group be formed?

Once a solution has been reached and the group has the "green light" to implement it, it should proceed deliberately and cautiously, making sure to consider possible consequences and address them as needed. (Credit: Harshal Desai/Traffic light at night/Unsplash)

Certain elements of the solution may need to be delegated out to various people inside and outside the group. Group members may also be assigned to implement a particular part of the solution based on their role in the decision-making or because it connects to their area of expertise. Likewise, group members may be tasked with publicizing the solution or "selling" it to a particular group of stakeholders. Last, the group should consider its future. In some cases, the group will get to decide if it will stay together and continue working on other tasks or if it will disband. In other cases, outside forces determine the group's fate.

SIX THINKING HATS METHOD

Edward de Bono developed the **Six Thinking Hats** method of thinking in the late 1980s, and it has since become a regular feature in problem-solving and decision-making training in business and professional contexts (de Bono, 1985). The method's popularity lies in its ability to help people get out of habitual ways of thinking and to allow group members to play different roles and see a problem or decision from multiple points of view. The basic idea is that each of the six hats represents a different way of thinking, and when we figuratively switch hats, we switch the way we think. The hats and their style of thinking are as follows:

- **White hat.** Objective—focuses on seeking information such as data and facts and then neutrally processes that information.
- **Red hat.** Emotional—uses intuition, gut reactions, and feelings to judge information and suggestions.
- **Black hat.** Critical—focuses on potential risks, points out possibilities for failure, and evaluates information cautiously and defensively.
- **Yellow hat.** Positive—is optimistic about suggestions and future outcomes, gives constructive and positive feedback, points out benefits and advantages.
- **Green hat.** Creative—tries to generate new ideas and solutions, thinks "outside the box."
- **Blue hat.** Process—uses metacommunication to organize and reflect on the thinking and communication taking place in the group, facilitates who wears what hat and when group members change hats.

Specific sequences or combinations of hats can be used to encourage strategic thinking. For example, the group leader may start off wearing the Blue Hat and suggest that the group start their decision-making process with some "White Hat thinking" to process through facts and other available information. During this stage, the group could also process through what other groups have done when faced with a similar problem. Then the leader could begin an evaluation sequence starting with two minutes of "Yellow Hat thinking" to identify potential positive outcomes, then "Black Hat thinking" to allow group members to express reservations about ideas and point out potential problems, then "Red Hat thinking" to get people's gut reactions to the previous discussion, then "Green Hat thinking" to identify other possible solutions that are more tailored to the group's situation or completely new approaches. At the end of a sequence, the Blue Hat would want to summarize what was said and begin a new sequence. To successfully use this method, the person wearing the Blue Hat should be familiar with different sequences and plan some of the thinking patterns ahead of time based on the problem and the group members. Each round of thinking should be limited to a certain time frame (two to five minutes) to keep the discussion moving.

1. This problem-solving method has been praised because it allows group members to "switch gears" in their thinking and allows for role-playing, which lets people express ideas more freely. How can this help enhance critical thinking? Which combination of hats do you think would be best for a critical thinking sequence?

2. What combinations of hats might be useful if the leader wanted to break the larger group up into pairs and why? For example, what kind of thinking would result from putting Yellow and Red together, Black and White together, or Red and White together, and so on?
3. Based on your preferred ways of thinking and your personality, which hat would be the best fit for you? Which would be the most challenging? Why?

Review & Reflection Questions

- What are the three common components of a problem? Based on these, what problems have you encountered in your group?
- What are the five steps of the reflective thinking process?
- What challenges might you face during the process and what strategies could you use to address those challenges?

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The chapter is adapted from "Problem Solving and Decision Making in Groups" in *Communication in the Real World* from the University of Minnesota. The book was adapted from a work produced and distributed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA) by a publisher who has requested that they and the original author not receive attribution. This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

CHAPTER 12.

IDENTIFYING LEADERS

Learning Objectives

- Define and describe leadership
- Distinguish between the various perspectives on why and how people become leaders
- Identify strategies for leading virtual teams

Leadership is one of the most studied aspects of group communication. Scholars in business, communication, psychology, and many other fields have written extensively about the qualities of leaders, theories of leadership, and how to build leadership skills. It's important to point out that although a group may have only one official leader, other group members play important leadership roles. Making this distinction also helps us differentiate between leaders and leadership (Hargie, 2011). The **leader** is a group role that is associated with a high-status position and may be formally or informally recognized by group members. **Leadership** is a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviors that influence the functioning of a group and move a group toward the completion of its task. A person in the role of leader may provide no or poor leadership. Likewise, a person who is not recognized as a "leader" in title can provide excellent leadership. In this chapter, we will discuss some approaches to the study of leadership, leadership styles, and leadership and group dynamics.

WHY AND HOW PEOPLE BECOME LEADERS

Throughout human history, some people have grown into, taken, or been given positions as leaders. Many early leaders were believed to be divine in some way. In some Indigenous cultures, shamans are considered leaders because they are believed to be bridges that can connect the spiritual and physical realms. Many early kings, queens, and military leaders were said to be approved by a god to lead the people. Today, many leaders are elected or appointed to positions of power, but most of them have already accumulated much experience in leadership roles. Some leaders are well respected, some are feared, some are hated, and many elicit some combination of these reactions. This brief overview

illustrates the centrality of leadership throughout human history, but it wasn't until the last hundred years that leadership became an object of systematic study.

We often think of leaders as those in designated roles — elected officials or perhaps our managers or bosses. However, not all leaders are designated, and not all of those in leader roles exhibit leadership. (Credit: Brooke Lark/My Favorite Mug/Unsplash)

Before we move onto specific approaches to studying leadership, let's distinguish between designated and emergent leaders. In general, some people gravitate more toward leadership roles than others, and some leaders are designated while others are emergent (Hargie, 2011). **Designated leaders** are officially recognized in their leadership role and may be appointed or elected by people inside or outside the group. Designated leaders can be especially successful when they are sought out by others to fulfill and are then accepted in leadership roles. On the other hand, some people seek out leadership positions not because they possess leadership skills and have been successful leaders in the past but because they have the drive to hold and wield power.

Many groups are initially leaderless and must either designate a leader or wait for one to emerge organically. **Emergent leaders** gain status and respect through engagement with the group and its task and are turned to by others as a resource when leadership is needed. Emergent leaders may play an important role when a designated leader unexpectedly leaves. We will now turn our attention to three common perspectives on why some people are more likely to be designated leaders than others and how leaders emerge in the absence of or in addition to a designated leader.

LEADERS EMERGE BECAUSE OF THEIR TRAITS

The **trait approach** to studying leadership distinguishes leaders from followers based on traits, or personal characteristics (Pavitt, 1999). Some traits that leaders, in general, share are related to physical appearance, communication ability, intelligence, and personality (Cragan & Wright, 1991). In terms of physical appearance, designated leaders tend to be taller and more attractive than other group members. This could be because we consciously and/or subconsciously associate a larger size (in terms of height and build, but not body fat) with strength and strength with good leadership. As far as communication abilities, leaders speak more fluently, have a more confident tone, and communicate more often than other group members. Leaders are also moderately more intelligent than other group members, which is attractive because leaders need good problem-solving skills. Interestingly, group members are not as likely to designate or recognize an emergent leader that they perceive to be exceedingly more intelligent than them. Last, leaders are usually more extroverted, assertive, and persistent than other group members. These personality traits help get these group members noticed by others, and expressivity is often seen as attractive and as a sign of communication competence.

The trait approach to studying leaders has provided some useful information regarding how people view ideal leaders, but it has not provided much insight into why some people become and are more successful leaders than others. The list of ideal traits is not final, because excellent leaders can have few, if any, of these traits and poor leaders can possess many. Additionally, these traits are difficult to change or control without much time and effort. Because these traits are enduring, there isn't much room for people to learn and develop leadership skills, which makes this approach less desirable for communication scholars who view leadership as a communication competence. Rather than viewing these traits as a guide for what to look for when choosing your next leader, view them as traits that are made meaningful through context and communication behaviors.

LEADERS EMERGE BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION

The **emergent approach** to studying leadership considers how leaders emerge in groups that are initially leaderless and how situational contexts affect this process (Pavitt, 1999). The situational context that surrounds a group influences what type of leader is best. Situations may be highly structured, highly unstructured, or anywhere in between (Cragan & Wright, 1991). Research has found that leaders with a high task orientation are likely to emerge in both highly structured contexts like a group that works to maintain a completely automated factory unit and highly unstructured contexts like a group that is responding to a crisis. Relational-oriented leaders are more likely to emerge in semistructured contexts that are less formal and in groups composed of people who have specific knowledge and are therefore be trusted to do much of their work independently (Fiedler, 1967). For example, a group of local business owners who form a group for professional networking would likely prefer a leader with a relational-oriented style, since these group members are likely already leaders in their own right and therefore might resent a person who takes a rigid task-oriented style over a more collegial style.

Leaders emerge differently in different groups, but there are two stages common to each scenario (Bormann & Bormann, 1988). The first stage only covers a brief period, perhaps no longer than a portion of one meeting. During this first stage, about half of the group's members are eliminated

from the possibility of being the group's leader. Remember that this is an informal and implicit process—not like people being picked for a kickball team or intentionally vetted. But there are some communicative behaviors that influence who makes the cut to the next stage of informal leader consideration. People will likely be eliminated as leader candidates if they do not actively contribute to initial group interactions if they contribute but communicate poorly, if they contribute but appear too rigid or inflexible in their beliefs, or if they seem uninformed about the task of the group.

The second stage of leader emergence is where a more or less pronounced struggle for leadership begins. In one scenario, a leader candidate picks up an ally in the group who acts as a supporter or lieutenant, reinforcing the ideas and contributions of the candidate. If there are no other leader candidates or the others fail to pick up a supporter, the candidate with the supporter will likely become the leader. In a second scenario, there are two leader candidates who both pick up supporters and who are both qualified leaders. This leads to a more intense and potentially prolonged struggle that can actually be uncomfortable for other group members. Although the two leader candidates don't overtly fight with each other or say, "I should be leader, not you!" they both take strong stances in regards to the group's purpose and try to influence the structure, procedures, and trajectory for the group. Group members not involved in this struggle may not know who to listen to, which can lead to low task and social cohesion and may cause a group to fail. In some cases, one candidate-supporter team will retreat, leaving a clear leader to step up. But the candidate who retreated will still enjoy a relatively high status in the group and be respected for vying for leadership. The second-place candidate may become a nuisance for the new emergent leader, questioning his or her decisions. Rather than excluding or punishing the second-place candidate, the new leader should give him or her responsibilities within the group to make use of the group member's respected status.

LEADERS EMERGE BASED ON COMMUNICATION SKILL AND COMPETENCE

This final approach to the study of leadership is considered a **functional approach** because it focuses on how particular communication behaviors function to create the conditions of leadership. This last approach is the most useful for communication scholars and for people who want to improve their leadership skills because leadership behaviors (which are learnable and adaptable) rather than traits or situations (which are often beyond our control) are the primary focus of study. As we've already learned, any group member can exhibit leadership behaviors, not just a designated or emergent leader. Therefore leadership behaviors are important for all of us to understand even if we don't anticipate serving in leadership positions (Cragan & Wright, 1991).

The communication behaviors that facilitate effective leadership encompass three main areas of group communication including task, procedural, and relational functions. Although any group member can perform leadership behaviors, groups usually have patterns of and expectations for behaviors once they get to the norming and performing stages of group development. Many groups only meet one or two times, and in these cases, it is likely that a designated leader will perform many of the functions to get the group started and then step in to facilitate as needed.

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's **task-related functions** include providing, seeking, and evaluating information. Leaders may want to be cautious about contributing ideas before soliciting ideas from group members, since the leader's contribution may sway or influence others

in the group, therefore diminishing the importance of varying perspectives. Likewise, a leader may want to solicit evaluation of ideas from members before providing his or her own judgment. In group situations where creativity is needed to generate ideas or solutions to a problem, the task leader may be wise to facilitate brainstorming and discussion. This can allow the leader to keep their eye on the "big picture" and challenge group members to make their ideas more concrete or discuss their implications beyond the group without adding his or her own opinion.

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's **procedural-related functions** help guide the group as it proceeds from idea generation to implementation. Some leaders are better at facilitating and managing ideas than they are at managing the administrative functions of a group. So while a group leader may help establish the goals of the group and set the agenda, another group member with more experience in group operations may step in to periodically revisit and assess progress toward completion of goals and compare the group's performance against its agenda. It's also important to check in between idea-generating sessions to clarify, summarize, and gauge the agreement level of group members. A very skilled and experienced leader may take primary responsibility for all these behaviors, but it's often beneficial to share them with group members to avoid becoming overburdened.

Leadership behaviors that contribute to a group's **relational functions** include creating a participative and inclusive climate, establishing norms of reflection, and self-analysis, and managing conflict. By encouraging participation among group members, a leader can help quell people who try to monopolize the discussion and create an overall climate of openness and equality. Leaders want to make sure that people don't feel personally judged for their ideas and that criticism remains idea-centered, not person-centered. A safe and positive climate typically leads to higher-quality idea generation and decision-making. Leaders also encourage group members to metacommunicate or talk about the group's communication. This can help the group identify and begin to address any interpersonal or communication issues before they escalate and divert the group away from accomplishing its goal. A group with a well-established participative and inclusive climate will be better prepared to handle conflict when it emerges. Remember that conflict when handled competently can enhance group performance. Leaders may even instigate productive conflict by playing devil's advocate or facilitating civil debate of ideas.

Table 1: **Key Leadership Behaviors**

Task Functions	*Procedural Functions*	*Relational Functions*
• Contributing ideas • Seeking ideas • Evaluating ideas • Seeking idea evaluation • Visualizing abstract ideas • Generalizing from specific ideas	• Goal setting • Agenda making • Clarifying • Summarizing • Verbalizing consensus • Generalizing from specific ideas	• Regulating participation • Climate making • Instigating group self-analysis • Resolving conflict • Instigating productive conflict

Source: Cragan & Wright (1991)

LEADERSHIP IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

To be most effective, groups or teams need a sense of community. A **community** can be defined as a physical or virtual space where people seeking interaction and shared interest come together to pursue their mutual goals, objectives, and shared values (Palloff & Pratt, 1999). For our purposes, the setting or space can be anywhere, at any time, but includes group or team members and, as you might have guessed, a leader. The need for clear expectations is key to the effective community, and it is never more true than in an online environment where asynchronous communication is the norm and physical interaction is limited or non-existent. Increasingly we manage teams from a distance, outsource services to professionals across the country, and interact across video and voice chats daily. The effective leader understands this and leverages the tools and technology to maximize group and team performance.

Whether a team meets face to face, virtually, or a combination of both, a leader leverages the tools at their disposal to maximize effectiveness and build a sense of community within the team. (Credit: Christina/WOCinTechChat/Unsplash)

From the opening post, welcome letter, or virtual meeting, the need to perceive acknowledgment and belonging is present, and the degree to which we can reinforce these messages will contribute to higher levels of interaction, better engagement across the project, retention throughout the mission, and successful completion of the goal or task. Online communities can have a positive effect by reducing the group member's feeling of isolation through extending leader-to-team member and team member-to-team member interaction. Fostering and developing a positive group sense of

community is a challenge, but the effective leader recognizes it as an important, if not critical, element of success.

Given the diversity of our teams and groups, there are many ways to design and implement task-oriented communities. Across this diversity, communication and the importance of positive interactions in each group is common ground. The following are five "best practices" for developing an effective online community as part of a support and interaction system for your team or group:

1. ***Clear expectations:*** The plan is the central guiding document for your project. It outlines the project information, expectations, deadlines, and often how communication will occur in the group. Much like a syllabus guides a course, a plan of action, from a business plan to a marketing plan, can serve as an important map for group or team members. With key benchmarks, quality standards, and proactive words of caution on anticipated challenges, the plan of action can be an important resource that contributes to team success.
2. ***Effective organization:*** Organization may first bring to mind the tasks, roles, and job assignments and their respective directions but consider: Where do we interact? What are the resources available? When do we collaborate? All these questions should be clearly spelled out to help team members know when and where to communicate.
3. ***Prompt and meaningful responses:*** Effective leaders are prompt. They know when people will be available and juggle time zones and contact information with ease. Same-day responses to team members is often the norm, and if you anticipate longer periods of time before responding, consider a brief email or text to that effect. The online community is fragile and requires a leader to help facilitate effective communication.
4. ***A positive tone in interaction and feedback:*** Constructive criticism will no doubt be a part of your communication with team members, but by demonstrating respect, offering praise as well as criticism, and by communicating in a positive tone, you'll be contributing to a positive community. One simple rule of thumb is to offer two comments of praise for every one of criticism. Of course, you may adapt your message for your own needs, but as we've discussed previously, trust is the foundation of the relationship and the student needs to perceive you are supportive of their success.

Review & Reflection Questions

- What is the difference between a leader and leadership?
- In what situations would a designated leader be better than an emergent leader, and vice versa? Why?
- How do the trait, emergent, and functional approaches to leadership differ?
- Do you have a clear 'leader' in your group? How did that person become the 'leader'?
- How can you exhibit leadership in virtual teams?

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CHAPTER 13.

LEADING IN GROUPS

Learning Objectives

- Identify situations where you may need to enact different leadership styles or strategies based on the context and needs of your group
- Distinguish between transactional and transformative leaders
- Identify the four characteristics of transformative leaders

In the previous chapter, you were introduced to definitions of leaders and leadership and to the various ways leaders are identified and emerge in groups. In this chapter, we will dive deeper into two specific theories and approaches to leadership relevant to groups and teams, specifically situational leadership and transformational leadership.

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Situational leadership, or leadership in context, means that leadership itself depends on the situation at hand. In sharp contrast to the idea of a "natural born leader" found in traits approaches to leadership, this viewpoint is relativist. Leadership is relative or varies, based on the context. There is no one "universal trait" to which we can point or principle to which we can observe in action. No style of leadership is more or less effective than another unless we consider the context. Then our challenge presents itself: how to match the most effective leadership strategy with the current context?

To match leadership strategies and context we first need to discuss the range of strategies as well as the range of contexts. While the strategies list may not be as long as we might imagine, the context list could go on forever. If we were able to accurately describe each context, and discuss each factor, we would quickly find the task led to more questions, more information, and the complexity would increase, making an accurate description or discussion impossible. Instead, we can focus our efforts on factors that each context contains and look for patterns, or common trends, that help us make generalizations about our observations.

For example, an emergency may require a leader to be direct, giving specific orders to each person.

Since each second counts, the quick thinking and actions at the direction of a leader may be the most effective strategy. To stop and discuss, vote, or check everyone's feelings on the current emergency situation may waste valuable time. That same approach applied to common governance or law-making may indicate a dictator is in charge, and that individuals and their vote are of no consequence. Instead, an effective leader in a democratic process may ask questions, gather viewpoints, and seek common ground as lawmakers craft a law that applies to everyone equally.

HERSEY AND BLANCHARD MODEL OF SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Hersey and Blanchard (1977) take the situational framework and apply it to an organizational perspective that reflects our emphasis on group communication. They assert that to be an effective manager, one needs to change their leadership style based on the context, including the skills, knowledge, and motivation of the people they are leading and the task details. Hersey and Blanchard focus on two key issues: tasks and relationships, and present the idea that we can to a greater or lesser degree focus on one or the other to achieve effective leadership in a given context. They offer four distinct leadership styles or strategies (abbreviated with an "S"):

1. **Directing (S1).** Leaders tell people what to do and how to do it.
2. **Coaching (S2).** Leaders provide direction, information, and guidance, but sell their message to gain compliance among group members.
3. **Supporting (S3).** Leaders focus on the relationships with group members and shares decision-making responsibilities with them.
4. **Delegating (S4).** Leaders focus on relationships, rely on professional expertise or group member skills, and monitor progress. They allow group members to be more directly responsible for individual decisions but may still participate in the process.

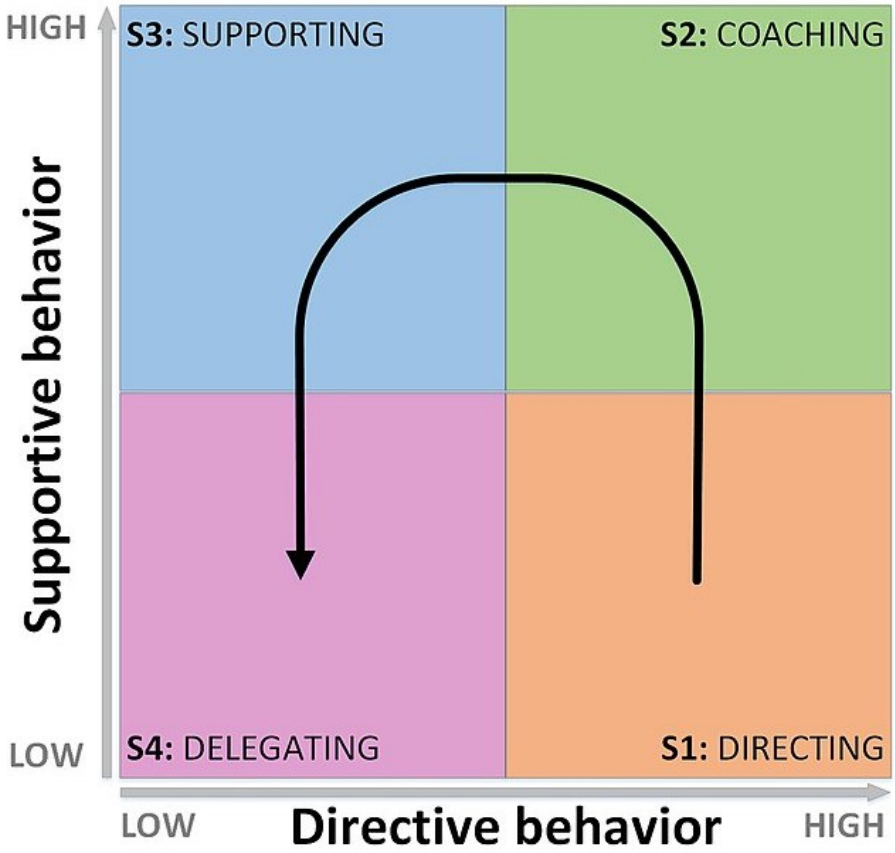

Figure 1: *Situational Leadership (Credit: Ftsn-Wikimedia/Figure of situational leadership/CC BY-SA 4.0)*

Directing and coaching strategies are all about getting the task done. Supporting and delegating styles are about developing relationships and empowering group members to get the job done. Each style or approach is best suited, according to Hersey and Blanchard, to a specific context. Again, assessing a context can be a challenging task but they indicate the focus should be on the development level of the group members. It is a responsibility of the leader to assess the group members and the degree to which they possess the ability to work independently or together effectively, including whether they have the competence, or the right combination of skills and abilities that the task requires, as well as the commitment or motivation to complete the task. Once again, they offer us four distinct levels (abbreviated with "D" for development):

1. **D1, or level one (low competence and high commitment).** This is the most basic level where group members lack the skills, prior knowledge, skills, or self-confidence to accomplish the task effectively. They need specific directions, and systems of rewards and punishment (for failure) may be featured. They will need external motivation from the leader to accomplish the task.
2. **D2, or level two (some competence and low commitment)** At this level the group members may possess the motivation, or the skills and abilities, but not both. They may need specific, additional instructions or may require external motivation to accomplish the task.
3. **D3, or level three (high competence and some commitment).** At this level we can observe group members who are ready to accomplish the task, are willing to participate, but may lack

confidence or direct experience, requiring external reinforcement and some supervision.

4. **D4, or level four (high competence and high commitment).** Finally, we can observe group members that are ready, prepared, willing, and confident in their ability to solve the challenge or complete the task. They require little supervision.

Now it is our task to match the style or leadership strategy to the development level of the group members as shown in the table below.

	Leadership Style (S)	Development Level (D)
1	S1	D1
2	S2	D2
3	S3	D3
4	S4	D4

This is one approach to situational leadership that applies to our exploration of group communication, but it does not represent all approaches. What other factors might you consider? How might we assess diversity, for example, in this approach? We might have a skilled professional who speaks English as their second language, and who comes from a culture where constant supervision is viewed as controlling or domineering, and if a leader takes an S1 approach to provide leadership, we can anticipate miscommunication and even frustration. The effective group communicator recognizes the Hersey-Blanchard approach provides insight and possible solutions to consider but also keeps the complexity of the context in mind when considering a course of action.

PATH-GOAL THEORY

A second situational leadership theory comes from Robert J. House and Martin Evans. Like Hersey and Blanchard, they assert that the type of leadership needed to enhance organizational effectiveness depends on the situation in which the leader is placed.

The model of leadership advanced by House and Evans is called the **path-goal theory of leadership** because it suggests that an effective leader provides organizational members with a *path* to a valued *goal.* According to House (1971), the motivational function of the leader consists of increasing personal payoffs to organizational members for work-goal attainment, and making the path to these payoffs easier to travel by clarifying it, reducing roadblocks and pitfalls, and increasing the opportunities for personal satisfaction en route.

Effective leaders, therefore, provide rewards that are valued by group members. In an organization, these rewards may be pay, recognition, promotions, or any other item that gives members an incentive to work hard to achieve goals. Effective leaders also give clear instructions so that ambiguities about work are reduced and followers understand how to do their jobs effectively. They provide coaching, guidance, and training so that followers can perform the task expected of them. They also remove barriers to task accomplishment, correcting shortages of materials, inoperative machinery, or interfering policies.

According to the path-goal theory, the challenge facing leaders is basically twofold. First, they must

analyze situations and identify the most appropriate leadership style. For example, experienced employees who work on a highly structured assembly line don't need a leader to spend much time telling them how to do their jobs—they already know this. The leader of an archeological expedition, though, may need to spend a great deal of time telling inexperienced laborers how to excavate and care for the relics they uncover.

Second, leaders must be flexible enough to use different leadership styles as appropriate. To be effective, leaders must engage in a wide variety of behaviors. Without an extensive repertoire of behaviors at their disposal, a leader's effectiveness is limited (Hoojiberg, 1996). All team members will not, for example, have the same need for autonomy. The leadership style that motivates organizational members with strong needs for autonomy (participative leadership) is different from that which motivates and satisfies members with weaker autonomy needs (directive leadership). The degree to which leadership behavior matches situational factors will determine members' motivation, satisfaction, and performance (see Figure 1; House & Dessler, 1974; House & Mitchell, 1974).

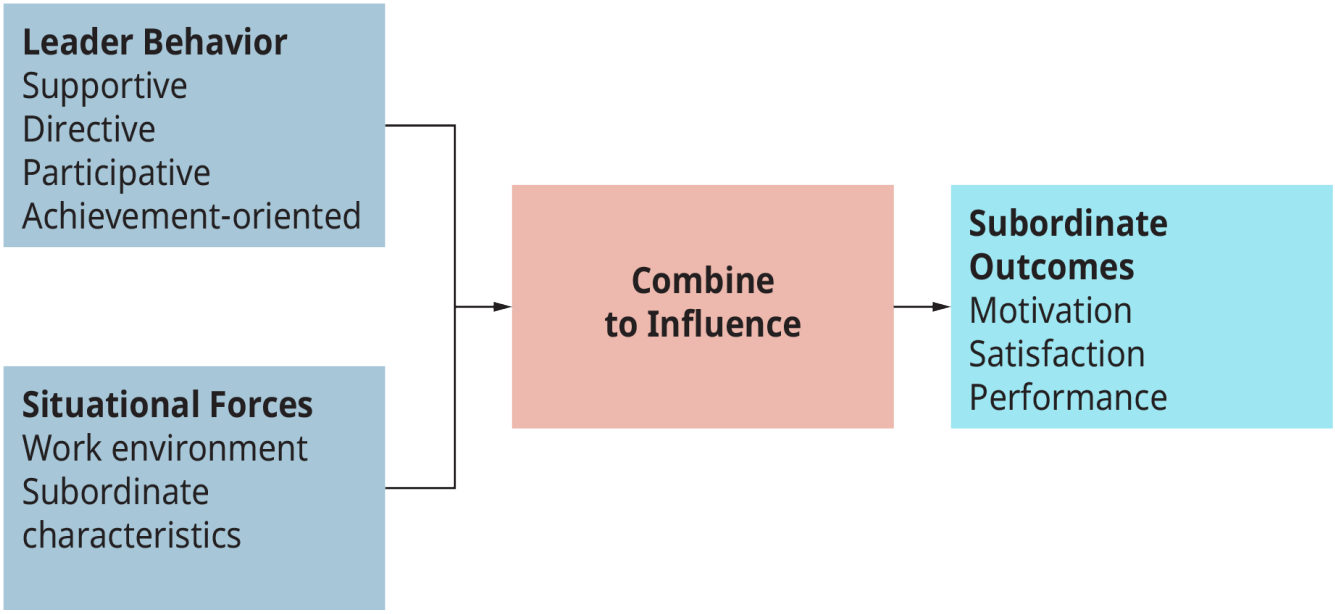

Figure 2: *The Path-Goal Leadership Model (Credit: Rice University/OpenStax/CC-BY 4.0 license)*

According to path-goal theory, there are four important dimensions of leader behavior, each of which is suited to a particular set of situational demands (House & Dessler, 1974; House & Mitchell, 1974; Keller, 1989).

- ***Supportive leadership***—At times, effective leaders demonstrate concern for the well-being and personal needs of organizational members. Supportive leaders are friendly, approachable, and considerate to individuals in the workplace. Supportive leadership is especially effective when an organizational member is performing a boring, stressful, frustrating, tedious, or unpleasant task. If a task is difficult and a group member has low self-esteem, supportive leadership can reduce some of the person's anxiety, increase his confidence, and increase satisfaction and determination as well.
- ***Directive leadership***—At times, effective leaders set goals and performance expectations, let organizational members know what is expected, provide guidance, establish rules and

procedures to guide work, and schedule and coordinate the activities of members. Directive leadership is called for when role ambiguity is high. Removing uncertainty and providing needed guidance can increase members' effort, job satisfaction, and job performance.

- ***Participative leadership***—At times, effective leaders consult with group members about job-related activities and consider their opinions and suggestions when making decisions. Participative leadership is effective when tasks are unstructured. Participative leadership is used to great effect when leaders need help in identifying work procedures and where followers have the expertise to provide this help.
- ***Achievement-oriented leadership***—At times, effective leaders set challenging goals, seek improvement in performance, emphasize excellence, and demonstrate confidence in organizational members' ability to attain high standards. Achievement-oriented leaders thus capitalize on members' needs for achievement and use goal-setting theory to great advantage.

Overall, there is no "One Size Fits All" leadership approach that works for every context, but the situational leadership viewpoint reminds us of the importance of being in the moment and assessing our surroundings, including our group members and their relative strengths and areas of emerging skill.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Our second approach, **transformational leadership**, emphasizes the vision, mission, motivations, and goals of a group or team and motivates them to accomplish the task or achieve the result. This model of leadership asserts that people will follow a person who inspires them, who clearly communicates their vision with passion, and helps get things done with energy and enthusiasm.

James MacGregor Burns (1978), a presidential biographer, first introduced the concept, discussing the dynamic relationship between the leader and the followers, as they together motivate and advance towards the goal or objective. Bass (1985) contributed to his theory, suggesting there are four key components of transformation leadership:

1. **Idealized Influence:** Transformational leaders serve as role models, demonstrating expertise, skills, and talent that others seek to emulate, inspiring positive actions while reinforcing trust and respect.
2. **Inspirational Motivation:** Transformational leaders communicate a clear vision, helping followers understand the individual steps necessary to accomplish the task or objective while sharing in the anticipation of completion.
3. **Individualized Consideration**: Transformational leaders recognize and celebrate each follower's unique contributions to the group.
4. **Intellectual stimulation:** Transformational leaders encourage creativity and ingenuity, challenging the status quo, and encouraging followers to explore new approaches and opportunities.

The leader conveys the group's goals and aspirations, displays a passion for the challenge that lies

ahead, and demonstrates a contagious enthusiasm that motivates group members to succeed. This approach focuses on the positive changes that need to occur for the group to be successful and requires the leader to be energetic and involved with the process, even helping individual members complete their respective roles or tasks.

An example of transformational leadership can be found in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who inspired others to follow and join in the fight for civil rights in the United States. (Credit: National Archives and Records Administration-Wikimedia/Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C./CC0 1.0)

Transformational leadership is considered to be distinct from transactional models of leadership. Bryman (1992) wrote that **transactional leaders** exchange rewards for performance. Transformational leaders, by contrast, provide group members with a vision to which they can all aspire. They also work to develop a team spirit so that it becomes possible to achieve that vision.

Den Hartog, Van Muijen, and Kopman (1997) distinguished clearly between these two kinds of leaders. They held that transactional leaders motivate group members to perform as expected, whereas transformational leaders inspire followers to achieve more than what is expected. Nanus (1992) wrote that transformational leaders accomplish these tasks by instilling pride and generating respect and trust; by communicating high expectations and expressing important goals in straightforward language; by promoting rational, careful problem-solving; and by devoting personal attention to group members.

Review & Reflection Questions

- Should our approach to leadership depend on the context? Why or why not?
- Using the two different theories of situational leadership, what leadership styles or strategies might be appropriate to use in your group? Why?
- What is the difference between a transactional and a transformational leader? What examples of transformational leadership have you observed?

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The section on "Path-Goal Theory" in this chapter was adapted from Bright, D.S., & Cortes, A. H. (2019). *Principles of management*. OpenStax. https://openstax.org/books/principles-management. Access the full chapter for free here. The content is available under a Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 license.

PART IV.

PUTTING GROUP COMMUNICATION SKILLS INTO PRACTICE

This section provides information on specific group communication skills and competencies.

CHAPTER 14.

FACILITATING GROUP MEETINGS

Learning Objectives

- Discuss how to prepare for group meetings
- Identify strategies for effectively facilitating meetings
- Understand how to use technology to aid in group communications

Meetings are a part of how groups get work done Some view meetings as boring, pointless, and futile exercises, while others see them as opportunities to exchange information and produce results. A combination of preparation and execution makes all the difference. Remember, too, that meetings do not have to take place in a physical space where the participants meet face to face. Instead, a number of technological tools make it possible to hold virtual meetings in which the participants are half a world away from one another. Virtual meetings are formally arranged gatherings where participants, located in distinct geographic locations, come together via the Internet.

PREPARATION

A meeting, like a problem-solving group, needs a clear purpose statement. The specific goal for the specific meeting will clearly relate to the overall goal of the group or committee. Determining your purpose is central to an effective meeting and getting together just to get together is called a party, not a meeting. Do not schedule a meeting just because you met at the same time last month or because it is a standing committee. Members will resent the intrusion into their schedules and quickly perceive the lack of purpose.

Similarly, if the need for a meeting arises, do not rush into it without planning. A poorly planned meeting announced at the last minute is sure to be less than effective. People may be unable to change their schedules, may fail to attend, or may impede the progress and discussion of the group because of their absence. Those who attend may feel hindered because they needed more time to prepare and present comprehensive results to the group or committee.

DECIDING HOW TO MEET

If a meeting is necessary, and a clear purpose can be articulated, then you'll need to decide how and where to meet. Distance is no longer an obstacle to participation, as we will see later in this section when we explore some of the technologies for virtual meetings. However, there are many advantages to meeting in person. People communicate not just with words but also with their body language—facial expressions, hand gestures, head nodding or head shaking, and posture. These subtleties of communication can be key to determining how group members really feel about an issue or question. Meeting in real time can be important, too, as all group members have the benefit of receiving new information at the same time. For purposes of our present discussion, we will focus on meetings taking place face to face in real time. Later in this chapter, we will discuss virtual meetings.

FORMULATING AN AGENDA

If you have a purpose statement for the meeting, then it also follows that you should be able to create an **agenda**, or a list of topics to be discussed. You may need to solicit information from members to formulate an agenda, and this pre-meeting contact can serve to encourage active participation. The agenda will have a time, date, place, and method of interaction noted, as well as a list of participants. It will also have a statement of purpose, a list of points to be considered, and a brief summary of relevant information that relates to each point. Somewhere on the agenda, the start and end times need to be clearly indicated, and it is always a good idea to leave time at the end for questions and additional points that individual members may want to share. If the meeting has an emotional point or theme, or the news is negative, plan for additional time for discussion, clarification, and recycling of conversations as the participants process the information.

INVITING MEETING PARTICIPANTS

If you are planning an intense work session, you need to consider the number of possible interactions among the participants and limit them. Smaller groups are generally more productive. If you are gathering to present information or to motivate the sales staff, a large audience, where little interaction is expected, is appropriate. Each member has a role, and attention to how and why they are interacting will produce the best results. Review the stages of group formation in view of the idea that a meeting is a short-term group. You can anticipate a "forming" stage, and if roles are not clear, there may be a bit of "storming" before the group establishes norms and becomes productive. Adding additional participants for no clear reason will only make the process more complex and may produce negative results.

Inviting the participants via e-mail has become increasingly common across business and industry. Software programs like Microsoft Outlook allow you to initiate a meeting request and receive an "accept" or "decline" response that makes the invitation process organized and straightforward. Reliance on a software program, however, may not be enough to encourage and ensure participation. A reminder on the individual's computer may go off fifteen minutes prior to the meeting, but if they are away from their computer or if Outlook is not running, the reminder will go unseen and unheard. A reminder e-mail on the day of the meeting, often early in the morning, can serve as a personal effort to highlight the activities of the day.

IDENTIFYING AN APPROPRIATE MEETING SPACE

There has been quite a discussion on the role of seating arrangements in meetings. Generally, a table that is square, rectangular, or U-shaped has a fixed point at which the attention is directed, often referred to as the head of the table. This space is often associated with power, status, and hierarchy and may play an important role in the flow of interactions across the meeting. If information is to be distributed and presented from administration to managers, for example, a table with a clear focal point for the head or CEO may be indicated. Tables that are round, or tables arranged in a circular pattern, allow for a more egalitarian model of interaction, reducing the hierarchical aspects while reinforcing the clear line of sight among all participants. If a meeting requires intense interaction and collaboration, generally a round table or a circular pattern is indicated.

One of the important decisions to make in planning for a meeting is the space in which you will hold it and the arrangements of that space. For example, different types of tables facilitate different kinds of interactions during the meeting. (Credit: Christina@WOCinTechChat/Unsplash)

Some meetings do not call for a table, but rather rows of seats all facing toward the speaker; you probably recognize this arrangement from many class lectures you have attended. For relatively formal meetings in which information is being delivered to a large number of listeners and little interaction is desired, seating in rows is an efficient use of space.

If you are the person responsible for the room reservation, confirm the reservation a week before the meeting and again the day before the meeting. Redundancy in the confirmation process can help

eliminate double-booking a room, where two meetings are scheduled at the same time. If technology is required at the meeting, such as a microphone, conference telephone, or laptop and projector, make sure you confirm their reservation at the same time as you confirm the meeting room reservation. Always personally inspect the room and test these systems prior to the meeting. There is nothing more embarrassing than introducing a high-profile speaker, such as the company president, and then finding that the PowerPoint projector is not working properly.

FACILITATING AN EFFECTIVE MEETING

Facilitating a meeting requires care, vigilance, flexibility, resilience, humility, and humor. In a way, to run a meeting effectively calls someone to act the way a skilled athletic coach does, watching the action, calling plays, and encouraging good performance. Furthermore, you need to monitor the interaction of everyone around you and "call the plays" based on a game plan that you and your fellow group members have presumably agreed upon in advance. Finally, like a coach, you sometimes need to call timeouts—breaks—when people are wary of the action is starting to get raggedy or undisciplined.

MEETING CHECKLIST FOR PARTICIPANTS

Mary Ellen Guffey (2007) provides a useful participant checklist that is adapted here for our use:

- Arrive on time and stay until the meeting adjourns (unless there are prior arrangements)
- Leave the meeting only for established breaks or emergencies
- Be prepared and have everything you need on hand
- Turn off cell phones and personal digital assistants
- Follow the established protocol for turn-taking
- Respect time limits
- Demonstrate professionalism in your verbal and nonverbal interactions
- Communicate interest and stay engaged in the discussion
- Avoid tangents and side discussions
- Respect space and don't place your notebook or papers all around you
- Clean up after yourself
- Engage in polite conversation after the conclusion

PERILS OF POOR FACILITATION

Unfortunately, many people lack the skills to effectively facilitate a meeting. As a result, a variety of negative results can take place as they fail to act capably as meeting facilitators. Here are some signs to watch for:

- An argument starts about an established fact.
- Opinions are introduced as if they were truths.
- People intimidate others with real or imaginary "knowledge."
- People overwhelm each other with too many proposals for the time available to consider them.
- People become angry for no good reason.
- People promote their own visions at the expense of everyone else's.
- People demand or offer much more information than is needed.
- Discussion becomes circular; people repeat themselves without making any progress toward conclusions.

GUIDELINES FOR FACILITATING A MEETING

Many authorities have recommended actions and attitudes which can help you facilitate a meeting well (Barge, 1991; Lumsden & Lumsden 2004; Parker & Hoffman, 2006). Here are several such suggestions, taken partly from these writers' works and partly from the authors' experiences as facilitators and participants in meetings over the years:

1. **Start promptly:** Calculate the cost to your group—even at minimum-wage rates—for the minutes its members sit around waiting for meetings to begin. You may occasionally be delayed for good reasons, but if you're chronically late you'll eventually aggravate folks who've arrived on time—the very ones whose professionalism you'd particularly like to reinforce and praise. Consistently starting on time may even boost morale: "Early in, early out" will probably appeal to most of a group's members, since they are likely to have other things they need to do as soon as a meeting ends.
2. **Begin with something positive:** Face it: no matter what you do, many people in your group would probably rather be somewhere else than in a meeting. If you'd like them to overcome this familiar aversion and get pumped up about what you'll be doing in a meeting, therefore, you might emulate the practice of City Year, a Boston-based nonprofit international service organization. City Year begins its meetings by inviting members to describe from their own recent life experiences an example of what Robert F. Kennedy referred to as a "ripple of hope" (Grossman, 1998). This could be a good deed they've seen someone do for someone else, a news item about a decline in the crime rate, or perhaps even a loving note they've received from a child or other family member. Sharing with their fellow group members such examples of altruism, love, or community improvement focuses and motivates City Year members by reminding them in specific, personal terms of why their meetings can be truly worthwhile.
3. **Tend to housekeeping details:** People's productivity depends in part on their biological state. Once you convene your meeting, announce or remind the group members of where they can find restrooms, water fountains, vending machines, and any other amenities that may contribute to their physical comfort.
4. **Make sure people understand their roles.** At the start of the meeting, review what you

understand is going to happen and ask for confirmation of what you think people are expected to do in the time you're going to be spending together. Calling on someone to make a report if he or she isn't aware it's required can be embarrassing for both you and that person.

5. **Keep to your agenda.** Social time makes people happy and relieves stress. Most group meetings, however, should not consist primarily of social time. You may want to designate someone in the group to watch for departures from the agenda and courteously direct people back on task. Either you or that person might want to periodically provide "signposts" indicating where you are in your process, too, such as "It looks like we've got 25 minutes left in our meeting, and we haven't discussed yet who's going to be working on the report to give to Mary." If your meetings habitually exceed the time you allot for them, consider either budgeting more time or, if you want to stick to your guns, setting a kitchen timer to ring when you've reached the point when you've said you'll quit. The co-founder of one technology firm, Jeff Atwood, put together a list of rules for his company's meetings which included this one: "No meeting should ever be more than an hour, under penalty of death (Milian, 2012). Similarly, the library staff at one college in the Midwest conducts all their meetings standing up in a circle, which encourages brevity and efficiency.
6. **Guide, don't dictate:** If you're in charge of the meeting, that doesn't mean you're responsible for everything people say in it, nor does it mean you have to personally comment on every idea or proposal that comes up. Let the other members of the group carry the content as long as they're not straying from the process you feel needs to be followed. You may see that some people regularly dominate discussion in your group's meetings and that others are perhaps slower to talk despite having important contributions to make. One way to deal with these disparities is by providing the group with a "talking stick" and specifying that people must hold it in their hands in order to speak. You could also invoke the "NOSTUESOrule" with respect to the talking stick, which says that "No One Speaks Twice Until Everybody Speaks Once."
7. **Keep your eyes open for nonverbal communication.** As a meeting progresses, people's physical and emotional states are likely to change. As the facilitator, you should do your best to identify such change and accommodate it within the structures and processes your group has established for itself. When people do something as simple as crossing their arms in front of them, for instance, they might be signaling that they're closed to what others are saying—or they might just be trying to stay warm in a room that feels too cold to them. When one person in the meeting has the floor and is talking, it's a good idea to watch how the rest of the group seems to be responding. You may notice clues indicating that people are pleased and receptive, or that they're uninterested, skeptical, or even itching to respond negatively. You may want to do a **perception check** to see if you're interpreting nonverbal cues accurately. For instance, you might say, "Terry, could we pause here a bit? I get the impression that people might have some questions for you." As an alternative, you might address the whole group and ask "Does anyone have questions for Terry at this point?"
8. **Capture and assign action items.** Unless they are held purely to communicate information, or for other special purposes, most meetings result in action items, tasks, and other assignments for one or more participants. Sometimes these items arise unexpectedly because someone

comes up with a great new idea and volunteers or is assigned to pursue it after the discussion ends. Be on the alert for these elements of a meeting.

9. **Make things fun and healthy.** Appeal to people's tummies and funnybones. Provide something to eat or drink, even if it's just coffee or peanuts in a bowl. Glenn Parker and George Hoffman's book on how to run meetings well includes a chapter titled "Eating Well=Meeting Well," and it also refers to the fact that the American Cancer Society offers a program to help groups organize meetings and other events with good health in mind.
10. **Avoid sarcasm and cynicism.** Encourage humor and merriment. If your agenda includes some challenging items, try to start out with "quick wins" to warm the mood of the group.
11. **Take breaks regularly, even when you think you don't need them.** If you've ever gone on a long hike on a beautiful day, you may have decided to continue a mile or two beyond your original intended destination because the scenery was beautiful and you were feeling spunky. If you're like the authors, though, you probably regretted "going the extra mile" later because it meant you had to go back that mile plus all the rest of the way you'd come. Something similar can arise in a meeting. People sometimes feel full of energy and clamor to keep a lively discussion going past the time scheduled for a break, but they may not realize that they're tiring and losing focus until someone says or does something ill-advised. Taking even five-minute breathers at set intervals can help group members remain physically refreshed over the long haul.
12. **Show respect for everyone.** Seek consensus. Avoid "groupthink" by encouraging a free and full airing of opinions. Observe the Golden Rule. Listen sincerely to everyone, but avoid giving a small minority so much clout that in disputed matters "99-to-1 is a tie." Keep disagreements agreeable. If you must criticize, criticize positions, not people. If someone's behavior shows a pattern of consistently irritating others or disrupting the flow of your group's meetings, talk to the person privately and express your concern in a polite but clear fashion. Be specific in stating what you expect the person to do or stop doing, and keep an open mind to whatever response you receive.
13. **Expect the unexpected.** Do your best to anticipate and prepare for confrontations and conflicts. If you didn't already make time to do so earlier, take a minute just before the start of the meeting to mark items on your agenda which you think might turn out to be especially contentious or time-consuming.
14. **Conduct multiple assessments of the meeting.** **Formative assessment** takes place during an activity and allows people to modify their behavior in response to its results. Why not perform a brief interim evaluation during every meeting in which you ask, for instance, "If we were to end this meeting right now, where would it be, and if we need to make changes now in what's happening in our meeting, what should they be?" **Summative assessment** is implemented at the end of an activity. When you finish a meeting, for example, you might check to see how well people feel that the gathering met its intended goals. If you want something in writing, you might distribute a half sheet of paper to each person asking "What was best about our meeting?" and "What might have made this meeting better?" Or you could write two columns on a whiteboard, one with a plus and the other with a minus, and ask people orally to identify

items they think belong in each category. If you feel a less formal check-up is sufficient, you might just go around the table or room and ask every person for one word that captures how she or he feels.

15. **Think (and talk) ahead.** If you didn't write it on your agenda—which would have been a good idea, most likely—remind group members, before the meeting breaks up, of where and when their next gathering is to take place.

POST-MEETING COMMUNICATION

Once the meeting has accomplished its goals in the established time frame, it is time to facilitate the transition to a conclusion. You may conclude by summarizing what has been discussed or decided, and what actions the group members are to take as a result of the meeting. If there is a clear purpose for holding a subsequent meeting, discuss the time and date, and specifically note assignments for next time.

Feedback is an important part of any communication interaction. **Minutes** are a written document that serves to record the interaction and can provide an opportunity for clarification. Minutes often appear as the agenda with notes in relation to actions taken during the meeting or specific indications of who is responsible for what before the next meeting. In many organizations, minutes of the meeting are tentative, like a rough draft, until they are approved by the members of the group or committee. Normally minutes are sent within a week of the meeting if it is a monthly event, and more quickly if they need to meet more frequently has been determined. If your group or organization does not call for minutes, you can still benefit by reviewing your notes after a meeting and comparing them with those of others to make sure you understood what was discussed and did not miss—or misinterpret—any key information.

USING TECHNOLOGY TO FACILITATE MEETINGS

Given the widespread availability and increasingly low cost of electronic communication, technologies that once served to bring people together across continents and time zones are now also serving people in the same geographic area. Rather than traveling (by plane, car, or even elevator within the same building) to a central point for face-to-face interaction, busy and cost-conscious professionals often choose to see and hear each other via one of many different electronic interface technologies. It is important to be aware of the dimensions of nonverbal communication that are lost in a virtual meeting compared to an in-person meeting. Nevertheless, these technologies are a boon to today's business organizations, and knowing how to use them is a key skill for all job seekers. We will discuss the technologies by category, beginning with audio-only, then audio-visual, and finally social media.

AUDIO-ONLY INTERACTIONS

The simplest form of audio-only interaction is, of course, a telephone call. Chances are that you have been using the phone all your life, yet did you know that some executives hire professional voice coaches to help them increase their effectiveness in phone communication? When you stop to think about it, we use a great many audio-only modes of communication, ranging from phone calls

and voice-activated telephone menus to radio interviews, public address systems, dictation recording systems, and computer voice recognition technology. The importance of audio communication in the business world has increased with the availability of conference calls, Web conferences, and voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) communications.

Your voice has qualities that cannot be communicated in written form, and you can use these qualities to your advantage as you interact with colleagues. If you are sending a general informative message to all employees, an e-mail may serve you well, but if you are congratulating one employee on receiving an industry award, your voice as the channel carries your enthusiasm.

Take care to pay attention to your pronunciation of words, stating them correctly in normal ways, and avoiding words that you are not comfortable with as you may mispronounce them. Mispronunciation can have a negative impact on your reputation or perceived credibility. Instead of using complicated words that may cause you to stumble, choose a simple phrase if you can, or learn to pronounce the word correctly before you use it in a formal interactive setting.

Your voice quality, volume, and pitch also influence how your spoken words are interpreted. **Quality** often refers to the emotional tone of your voice, from happy and enthusiastic to serious or even sad. In most business situations, it is appropriate to speak with some level of formality, yet avoid sounding stilted or arrogant. Your **volume** (the loudness of your voice) should be normal, but do make sure your listeners can hear you. In some situations, you may be using a directional microphone that only amplifies your voice signal if you speak directly into it.

If your audience includes English learners, remember that speaking louder (i.e., shouting) does not help them to understand you any better than speaking in a normal tone. Your word choices will make a much more significant impact when communicating across cultures; strive to use direct sentences and avoid figures of speech that do not translate literally.

Pitch refers to the frequency, high or low, of your voice. A pleasant, natural voice will have some variation in pitch. A speaker with a flat pitch, or a monotone (one-tone) voice, is often interpreted as being bored and often bores his or her listeners.

If you are leaving a voice mail, state all the relevant information in concise, clear terms, making sure to speak slowly; don't forget to include your contact information, even if you think the person already knows your phone number. Imagine you were writing down your phone number as you recite it and you will be better able to record it at a "listener-friendly" speed. Don't leave a long, rambling voice mail message. You may later wish you had said less, and the more content you provide the more you increase the possibility for misunderstandings without your being present for clarification.

AUDIO-VISUAL INTERACTIONS

Rather than call each other, we often call and interact in both audio and visual ways via the Internet. There are several ways to interface via audio and video, and new technologies in this area are being invented all the time. For example, platforms like Zoom or WebX allow participants to see and hear each other across time and distance with one-on-one calls and video conferencing. This form of audio-visual communication is quickly becoming a low- or no-cost business tool for interaction.

On the Internet, a majority of our interactions take place audio-visually, using platforms such as Skype or Zoom. (Credit: Chris Montgomery/Zoom Call with Coffee/Unsplash).

If you are going to interact via audio and visual signals, make sure you are prepared. Appropriate dress, setting, and attitude are all required. Pay close attention to your surroundings and what will be visible to others. The integration of a visual signal to the traditional phone call means that nonverbal gestures can now be observed in real time and can both aid and detract from the message.

If you are unfamiliar with the technology, practice with it before your actual business interaction. Try out the features with a friend and know where to find and access the information. If the call doesn't go as planned, or the signal isn't what you expected or experienced in the past, keep a good attitude and try again.

TIPS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Here are some further tips and suggestions for leading or participating in virtual meetings, each based on the unique features of such gatherings:

1. Get all the participants in an audio meeting to say something brief at the start of the meeting so that everyone becomes familiar with everyone else's voice.
2. Remind people of the purpose of the meeting and of the key outcome(s) you hope to achieve together.

3. Listen/watch for people who aren't participating and ask them periodically if they have thoughts or suggestions to add to the discussion.
4. Summarize the status of the meeting from time to time.
5. If you're holding an audio conference, discourage people from calling in on a cell phone because of potential problems with sound quality.
6. Because you may not have nonverbal cues to refer to, ask other members to clarify their meanings and intentions if you're not sure their words alone convey all you need to know.
7. If you know you're going to have to leave a meeting before it ends, inform the organizer in advance. Sign off publicly, but quickly, when you leave rather than just hanging up on the meeting connection.

Review & Reflection Questions

- Imagine you are about to meet with your group for the first time. What are key steps you want to consider in preparing for a meeting? What items might you want to include on your first agenda?
- Reflect on meetings you have attended in the past. What strategies have you observed facilitators use? What did you find to be effective and ineffective?
- How might you use technology to conduct a group meeting? What might be the advantages and disadvantages?

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AUTHOR & ATTRIBUTION

The sections "Preparation," "Post-Meeting Communication" and "Using Technology to Facilitate Meetings" are adapted from "Business and Professional Meetings" in *Business Communication for Success* from the University of Minnesota. The book was adapted from a work produced and distributed under a Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA) by a publisher who has requested that they and the original author not receive attribution. This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

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CHAPTER 15.

ENHANCING CREATIVITY IN GROUPS

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish between creativity and innovation
- Understand the utility of creativity techniques
- Identify the ground rules and key steps for effective brainstorming
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different creativity techniques

Creativity is a concept related to creating ideas that are both novel and useful in some context. It is considered a fundamental trait for industry professionals and academics in the 21st century. This chapter will first define creativity and distinguish it from innovation. Then, it will discuss techniques for enhancing creativity in groups and teams.

UNDERSTANDING CREATIVITY

Creative thought is a mental process involving creative problem solving and the discovery of new ideas or concepts, or new associations of the existing ideas or concepts, fueled by the process of either conscious or unconscious insight. From a scientific point of view, the products of creative thought (sometimes referred to as divergent thought) are usually considered to have both originality *and* appropriateness.

Although intuitively a simple phenomenon, it is in fact quite complex. It has been studied from the perspectives of behavioral psychology, social psychology, psychometrics, cognitive science, artificial intelligence, philosophy, aesthetics, history, economics, design research, business, management, and communication, among others. The studies have covered everyday creativity, exceptional creativity, and even artificial creativity. Unlike many phenomena in science, there is no single, authoritative perspective or definition of creativity. And unlike many phenomena in psychology, there is no standardized measurement technique.

Creative problem solving helps groups generate new ideas to address problems or challenges. (Credit: Patrick Tomasso/Bright Ideas/Unsplash)

Creative problem solving is the process of creating a solution to a problem. It is a special form of problem-solving in which the solution is independently created rather than learned with assistance. Creative problem solving always involves creativity. However, creativity often does not involve creative problem solving, especially in fields such as music, poetry, and art. Creativity requires newness or novelty as a characteristic of what is created, but creativity does not necessarily imply that what is created has value or is appreciated by other people. To qualify as creative problem solving the solution must either have value, clearly solve the stated problem, or be appreciated by someone for whom the situation improves (Fobes, 1993). The situation prior to the solution does not need to be labeled as a problem. Alternate labels include a challenge, an opportunity, or a situation in which there is room for improvement (Fobes, 1993).

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

It is often useful to explicitly distinguish between *creativity* and *innovation*. Creativity is typically used to refer to the act of producing new ideas, approaches, or actions, while **innovation** is the process of both generating *and applying* such creative ideas in some specific context.

In the context of an organization, therefore, the term **innovation** is often used to refer to the entire process by which an organization generates creative new ideas and converts them into novel, useful, and viable commercial products, services, and business practices, while the term creativity is reserved to apply specifically to the generation of novel ideas by individuals or groups, as a necessary step within the innovation process. For example, Amabile et al. (1996) suggest that while innovation "begins with creative ideas,"

> "…creativity by individuals and teams *is a starting point for innovation*; the first is a necessary *but not sufficient* condition for the second."

Although the two words are novel, they go hand in hand. To be innovative, employees have to be creative to stay competitive.

CREATIVITY TECHNIQUES

Creativity techniques are methods that promote original thoughts by facilitating divergent and/or convergent thinking. Many of the techniques and tools for creating an effective solution to a problem are described in creativity techniques and problem-solving.

Creative-problem-solving techniques can be categorized as follows:

- **Creativity techniques designed to shift a person's mental state into one that fosters creativity.** These techniques are described in creativity techniques. One such popular technique is to take a break and relax or sleep after intensively trying to think of a solution.
- **Creativity techniques designed to reframe the problem.** For example, reconsidering one's goals by asking "What am I really trying to accomplish?" can lead to useful insights.
- **Creativity techniques designed to increase the quantity of fresh ideas.** This approach is based on the belief that a larger number of ideas increases the chances that one of them has value. Some of these techniques involve randomly selecting an idea (such as choosing a word from a list), thinking about similarities with the undesired situation, and hopefully inspiring a related idea that leads to a solution. Such techniques are described in creativity techniques.
- **Creative problem-solving techniques designed to efficiently lead to a fresh perspective that causes a solution to become obvious**. This category is useful for solving especially challenging problems (Fobes, 1993). Some of these techniques involve identifying independent dimensions that differentiate (or separate) closely associated concepts (Fobes, 1993). Such techniques can overcome the mind's instinctive tendency to use "oversimplified associative thinking" in which two related concepts are so closely associated that their differences, and independence from one another, are overlooked (Fobes, 1993).

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is a commonly used group creativity technique designed to generate a large number of ideas for the solution of a problem. In 1953 the method was popularized by Alex Faickney Osborn in a book called *Applied Imagination.* Osborn proposed that groups could double their creative output with brainstorming. Although brainstorming has become a popular group technique, when applied in a traditional group setting, researchers have not found evidence of its effectiveness for enhancing either the quantity or quality of ideas generated. Because of such problems as distraction, social loafing, evaluation apprehension, and production blocking, conventional brainstorming groups are little more effective than other types of groups, and they can actually be less effective than individuals working independently depending on the circumstances (Diehl & Stroebe, 1991; Mullen, Johnson, & Salas, 1991; Nijstad, Stroebe, & Lodewijkx, 2003). In the *Encyclopedia of Creativity*, Tudor Rickards (1999), in his entry on brainstorming, summarizes its controversies and indicates the dangers of conflating productivity in group work with the quantity of ideas.

Although traditional brainstorming does not necessarily increase the productivity of groups (as measured by the number of ideas generated), it may still provide benefits, such as boosting morale, enhancing work enjoyment, and improving teamwork. Thus, numerous attempts have been made to

improve brainstorming or use more effective variations of the basic technique. For example, Olivier Toubia (2006) of Columbia University has conducted extensive research in the field of idea generation and has concluded that incentives are extremely valuable within the brainstorming context.

From these attempts to improve brainstorming, electronic brainstorming, or brainstorming using digital tools, stands out. Mainly through anonymization and parallelization of input, electronic brainstorming enforces the ground rules of effective brainstorming and thereby eliminates most of the deleterious or inhibitive effects of group work (Nunamaker et al., 1991). The positive effects of electronic brainstorming become more pronounced with group size (Dennis & Valacich, 1993). The following sections highlight the ground rules and key steps in the brainstorming process.

Ground Rules

There are four basic rules in brainstorming (Osborn, 1963). These are intended to reduce social inhibitions among group members, stimulate idea generation, and increase the overall creativity of the group.

1. **Focus on quantity**: This rule is a means of enhancing divergent production, aiming to facilitate problem-solving through the maxim *quantity breeds quality*. The assumption is that the greater the number of ideas generated, the greater the chance of producing a radical and effective solution.
2. **Withhold criticism**: In brainstorming, criticism of ideas generated should be put 'on hold'. Instead, participants should focus on extending or adding to ideas, reserving criticism for a later 'critical stage' of the process. By suspending judgment, participants will feel free to generate unusual ideas.
3. **Welcome unusual ideas**: To get a good and long list of ideas, unusual ideas are welcomed. They can be generated by looking from new perspectives and suspending assumptions. These new ways of thinking may provide better solutions.
4. **Combine and improve ideas**: Good ideas may be combined to form a single better good idea, as suggested by the slogan "1+1=3". It is believed to stimulate the building of ideas by a process of association.

Pre-Work

Set the problem

Before a brainstorming session, it is critical to define the problem. The problem must be clear, not too big, and captured in a specific question such as "What service for mobile phones is not available now, but needed?". If the problem is too big, the facilitator should break it into smaller components, each with its own question.

Create a background memo

The background memo is the invitation and informational letter for the participants, containing the session name, problem, time, date, and place. The problem is described in the form of a question, and

some example ideas are given. The memo is sent to the participants well in advance so that they can think about the problem beforehand.

Select participants

The facilitator composes the brainstorming panel, consisting of the participants and an idea collector. A group of 10 or fewer members is generally more productive. Many variations are possible but the following composition is suggested.

- Several core members of the project who have proved themselves.
- Several guests from outside the project, with affinity to the problem.
- One idea collector who records the suggested ideas.

Create a list of lead questions

During the brainstorm session, the creativity may decrease. At this moment, the facilitator should stimulate creativity by suggesting a lead question to answer, such as *Can we combine these ideas?* or *How about looking from another perspective?*. It is best to prepare a list of such leads before the session begins.

Session Conduct

The facilitator leads the brainstorming session and ensures that ground rules are followed. The steps in a typical session are:

1. A warm-up session, to expose novice participants to the criticism-free environment. A simple problem is brainstormed, for example, *What should our next fundraising event be?* or *What can be improved in Microsoft programs?*.
2. The facilitator presents the problem and gives a further explanation if needed.
3. The facilitator asks the brainstorming group for their ideas.
4. If no ideas are forthcoming, the facilitator suggests a lead to encourage creativity.
5. All participants present their ideas, and the idea collector records them.
6. To ensure clarity, participants may elaborate on their ideas.
7. When time is up, the facilitator organizes the ideas based on the topic goal and encourages discussion.
8. Ideas are categorized.
9. The whole list is reviewed to ensure that everyone understands the ideas.
10. Duplicate ideas and obviously infeasible solutions are removed.
11. The facilitator thanks participants and gives each a token of appreciation.

The Process

- Participants who have ideas but were unable to present them are encouraged to write down the ideas and present them later.

- The idea collector should number the ideas, so that the chairperson can use the number to encourage an idea generation goal, for example, *We have 44 ideas now, let's get it to 50!*
- The idea collector should repeat the idea in the words he or she has written verbatim, to confirm that it expresses the meaning intended by the originator.
- When many participants are having ideas, the one with the most associated idea should have priority. This is to encourage elaboration on previous ideas.
- During a brainstorming session, managers and other superiors may be discouraged from attending, since it may inhibit and reduce the effect of the four basic rules, especially the generation of unusual ideas.

Evaluation

Brainstorming is not just about generating ideas for others to evaluate and select. Usually, the group itself will, in its final stage, evaluate the ideas and select one as the solution to the problem proposed to the group.

- The solution should not require resources or skills the members of the group do not have or cannot acquire.
- If acquiring additional resources or skills is necessary, that needs to be the first part of the solution.
- There must be a way to measure progress and success.
- The steps to carry out the solution must be clear to all, and amenable to being assigned to the members so that each will have an important role.
- There must be a common decision-making process to enable a coordinated effort to proceed and to reassign tasks as the project unfolds.
- There should be evaluations at milestones to decide whether the group is on track toward a final solution.
- There should be incentives to participate so that participants maintain their efforts.

VARIATIONS

While brainstorming as described above is a common creativity technique, there are many variations that groups may find useful. In this section, we highlight six different brainstorming approaches including (1) nominal group technique, (2) group passing technique, (3) team idea mapping method, (4) electronic brainstorming, (5) directed brainstorming, and (6) question brainstorming.

Nominal group technique

The **nominal group technique** is a type of brainstorming that encourages all participants to have an equal say in the process. It is also used to generate a ranked list of ideas.

Participants are asked to first write down their ideas. Then they each share their ideas orally or the

moderator collects the ideas and each is voted on by the group. The vote can be as simple as a show of hands in favor of a given idea. This process is called distillation.

After distillation, the top-ranked ideas may be sent back to the group or subgroups for further brainstorming. For example, one group may work on the color required in a product. Another group may work on the size, and so forth. Each group will come back to the whole group for ranking the listed ideas. Sometimes ideas that were previously dropped may be brought forward again once the group has re-evaluated the ideas.

It is important that the facilitator be trained in this process before attempting to facilitate this technique. The group should be primed and encouraged to embrace the process. Like all team efforts, it may take a few practice sessions to train the team in the method before tackling the important ideas.

A variation of nominal technique called **affinity technique** involves using Post-it notes to first generate ideas and then work together to categorize the Post-it notes.

A group makes use of the affinity technique, a method of brainstorming that involves first writing down ideas on Post-it notes and then working together to categorize and sort ideas. (Credit: You X Ventures/Unsplash)

Group passing technique

In the **group passing technique**, each person in a circular group writes down one idea and then passes the piece of paper to the next person in a clockwise direction, who adds some thoughts. This

continues until everybody gets his or her original piece of paper back. By this time, it is likely that the group will have extensively elaborated on each idea.

The group may also create an "Idea Book" and post a distribution list or routing slip to the front of the book. On the first page is a description of the problem. The first person to receive the book lists his or her ideas and then routes the book to the next person on the distribution list. The second person can log new ideas or add to the ideas of the previous person. This continues until the distribution list is exhausted. A follow-up "read out" meeting is then held to discuss the ideas logged in the book. This technique takes longer, but it allows individuals time to think deeply about the problem.

Team idea mapping method

The **idea mapping method** of brainstorming works by the method of association. It may improve collaboration and increase the quantity of ideas, and is designed so that all attendees participate and no ideas are rejected.

The process begins with a well-defined topic. Each participant brainstorms individually, then all the ideas are merged onto one large idea map. During this consolidation phase, participants may discover a common understanding of the issues as they share the meanings behind their ideas. During this sharing, new ideas may arise by the association, and they are added to the map as well. Once all the ideas are captured, the group can prioritize and/or take action.

Electronic brainstorming

Electronic brainstorming is a version of the manual brainstorming technique that relies on digital tools like video conference calls, collaborative documents, chat tools, or even email. Participants share a list of ideas, which are entered independently. In synchronous electronic brainstorming, contributions become immediately visible to all and are typically anonymized to encourage openness and reduce personal prejudice. Some digital tools may allow for asynchronous brainstorming sessions over extended periods of time as well as typical follow-up activities in the creative problem-solving process such as categorization of ideas, elimination of duplicates, assessment, and discussion of prioritized or controversial ideas.

Electronic brainstorming eliminates many of the problems of standard brainstorming, such as production blocking and evaluation apprehension. An additional advantage of this method is that all ideas can be archived electronically in their original form, and then retrieved later for further thought and discussion. Electronic brainstorming also enables much larger groups to brainstorm on a topic than would normally be productive in a traditional brainstorming session (Gallupe et al., 1992).

Some web-based brainstorming techniques allow contributors to post their comments anonymously. This technique also allows users to log on over an extended time period, typically one or two weeks, to allow participants some "soak time" before posting their ideas and feedback.

Directed brainstorming

Directed brainstorming is a variation of electronic brainstorming (described above). It can be done manually or with computers. Directed brainstorming works when the solution space (that is, the

criteria for evaluating a good idea) is known before the session. If known, that criteria can be used to intentionally constrain the ideation process.

In directed brainstorming, each participant is given one sheet of paper (or electronic form) and told the brainstorming question. They are asked to produce one response and stop, then all of the papers (or forms) are randomly swapped among the participants. The participants are asked to look at the idea they received and to create a new idea that improves on that idea based on the initial criteria. The forms are then swapped again and respondents are asked to improve upon the ideas, and the process is repeated for three or more rounds. In the laboratory, directed brainstorming has been found to almost triple the productivity of groups over electronic brainstorming (Santanen et al., 2004).

Question Brainstorming

Question brainstorming process involves generating *questions*, rather than trying to come up with immediate answers and short-term solutions. This technique stimulates creativity and promotes everyone's participation because no one has to come up with answers. The answers to the questions form the framework for constructing future action plans. Once the list of questions is set, it may be necessary to prioritize them to reach the best solution in an orderly way (Ludy, 2000). Another of the problems for brainstorming can be to find the best evaluation methods for a problem. Brainstorming all the questions has also been called *questorming* (Roland, *1985).*

CONCLUSION

Creativity is the ability to generate innovative ideas and manifest them from thought into reality. The process involves original thinking and then producing. Many techniques can be used to enhance creativity in groups. Brainstorming is a popular method of group interaction in both educational and business settings. Electronic brainstorming effectively overcomes barriers inherent in group work like production blocking mainly through anonymization and parallelization of contributions (McFadzean, 1997). Other variations of brainstorming that do not require an electronic system may also prove superior to the original technique. How well these methods work, and whether or not they should be classified as brainstorming, are questions that require further research.

Review & Reflection Questions

- What is the difference between creativity and innovation?
- What are some of the important steps to keep in mind when brainstorming?
- What creativity techniques might work best for your group? Why?

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CHAPTER 16.

PRESENTING AS A GROUP

Learning Objectives

- List the four common types of group presentations
- Discuss techniques for coordinating a group assignment
- Plan speech organization for the intended audience
- Practice effective group delivery

Imagine you have been assigned to a group for a project requiring a presentation at the end. "Now is the busiest time in my schedule and I do not have time to fit all these people into it," the voice in your head reminds you. Then you ask the question: "Is there ever a non-busy time for assembling a group together for a presentation ?" These thoughts are a part of a group presentation assignment. The combined expertise of several individuals is becoming increasingly necessary in many *vocational* (related to a specific occupation) and *avocational* (outside a specific occupation) presentations.

Group presentations in business may range from a business team exchanging sales data; research and development teams discussing business expansion ideas; to annual report presentations by boards of directors. Also, the government, private, and public sectors have many committees that participate in briefings, conference presentations, and other formal presentations. It is common for group presentations to be requested, created, and delivered to bring together the expertise of several people in one presentation. Thus, the task of deciding the most valuable information for audience members has become a coordination task involving several individuals. All group members are responsible for coordinating things such as themes, strong support/evidence, and different personalities and approaches in a specified time period. **Coordination** is defined in the dictionary as harmonious combination or interaction, as of functions or parts.

This chapter focuses on how the group, the speech assignment, the audience, and the presentation design play a role in the harmonious combination of planning, organization, and delivery for group presentations.

PREPARING ALL PARTS OF THE ASSIGNMENT

In group presentations, you are working to coordinate one or two outcomes—outcomes related to the content (product outcomes) and/or outcomes related to the group skills and participation (process outcomes). Therefore, it is important to carefully review and outline the prescribed assignment of the group before you get large quantities of data, spreadsheets, interview notes, and other research materials.

TYPES OF GROUP PRESENTATIONS

A key component of a preparation plan is the type of group presentation. Not all group presentations require a format of standing in front of an audience and presenting. According to Sprague and Stuart (2005), there are four common types of group presentations:

- A structured argument in which participants speak for or against a pre-announced proposition is called a **debate.** The proposition is worded so that one side has the burden of proof, and that same side has the benefit of speaking first and last. Speakers assume an advocacy role and attempt to persuade the audience, not each other.
- The **forum** is essentially a question-and-answer session. One or more experts may be questioned by a panel of other experts, journalists, and/or the audience.
- A **panel** consists of a group of experts publicly discussing a topic among themselves. Individually prepared speeches, if any, are limited to very brief opening statements.
- Finally, the **symposium** is a series of short speeches, usually informative, on various aspects of the same general topic. Audience questions often follow (p. 318).

These four types of presentations, along with the traditional group presentation in front of an audience or on-the-job speaking, typically have pre-assigned parameters. Therefore, all group members must be clear about the assignment request.

Dr. Anthony Junior, left, education programs manager for the Office of Naval Research, moderates a panel discussion during the World Diversity Leadership Summit at the El Museo del Barrio in New York City in 2011. A panel is one example of a type of group presentation. (Credit: U.S. Navy photo by John F. Williams/US Navy 110907-N-PO203-063/Public domain)

ESTABLISHING CLEAR OBJECTIVES

For the group to accurately summarize for themselves who is the audience, what is the situation/occasion, and what supporting materials need to be located and selected, the group should establish clear objectives about both *the process* and *the product* being assessed.

Assessment plays a central role in optimizing the quality of group interaction. Thus, it is important to be clear whether the group is being assessed on the product(s) or outcome(s) only or will the processes within the group—such as equity of contribution, individual interaction with group members, and meeting deadlines—also be assessed. Kowitz and Knutson (1980) argue that three dimensions for group evaluation include (1) *informational*—dealing with the group's designated tasks; (2) *procedural*—referring to how the group coordinates its activities and communication; and (3) *interpersonal*—focusing on the relationships that exist among members while the task is being accomplished. Groups without a pre-assigned assessment rubric may use the three dimensions to effectively create a group evaluation instrument.

The group should determine if the product includes both a written document and an oral presentation. The written document and oral presentation format may have been pre-assigned with an expectation behind the requested informative and/or persuasive content. Although the two should

complement each other, the audience, message, and format for each should be clearly outlined. The group may create a product assessment guide (see **Table 1)**. Additionally, each group member should uniformly write down the purpose of the assignment. You may think you can keep the purpose in your head without any problem. Yet the goal is for each member to consistently have the same outcome in front of them. This will bring your research, writing, and thinking back to focus after engaging in a variety of resources or conversations.

Once the assignment has been coordinated in terms of the product and process objectives, type of presentation, and logistics, it is important for the group to clearly write down the agreed outcomes. Agreed outcomes about the product include a **purpose statement** that reflects an agreement with the prescribed assignment (i.e. "at the end of our group presentation the audience will be informed or persuaded about the prescribed assignment"). It also includes the key message or thesis to be developed through a **presentation outline**, a full-sentence outline of virtually everything the speaker intends to say. The outline allows the speakers to test the structure, the logic, and persuasive appeals in the speech (DiSanza & Legge, 2011, p. 131).

T*able 1:* Sample Product Assessment Guide:

Accuracy:	• Did we edit and proofread to eliminate redundancy, grammatical, spelling, and/or punctuation errors in all pieces including PowerPoint?
Approach:	• Is the tone appropriate to the purpose, audience, and content?
Clarity:	• Is the central purpose clearly stated and maintained as the focal point?
Development:	• Is the material arranged in a coherent and logical sequence?
Style:	• Did we use action verbs, active voice, and correct MLA or APA style?

LOGISTICS FOR GROUP MEMBERS

As a group, be very clear about the length of your presentation and its preparation. The length of the presentation refers to your time limit, and whether there is a question and answer period involved. Assignment preparation may or may not have a prescribed deadline. If the assignment does not have a deadline, then set one as a group. If there is a deadline, then the group begins by creating a schedule from the final deadline. As a group, create an action timetable explicitly listing all processes and outputs, as well as communication update points.

As a group, decide the best way to leave enough time in the end to put all the pieces together and make sure everything is complete. If there is a written document, it should be completed prior to the oral presentation rather than at the same time. As a group, realize not everyone may work off a physical calendar. Thus, do not hesitate to require each member to write down all deadlines.

Next, the group can strategically add meeting dates, times, and venues to the action timetable. A

meeting is a structured conversation among a small group of people who gather to accomplish a specific task (Beebe & Mottet, 2010). For group presentations, meetings do not always include the entire group. So a schedule of who meets with whom and when is useful for planning work and agendas. In addition, all meetings do not serve the same purpose. For example, *informational meetings* may be called simply to update all group members; *solicitation meetings* are called to solicit opinions or request guidance from group members; group-building meetings are designed to promote unity and cohesiveness among group members; and *problem-solving meetings* result in making decisions or recommendations by the time the meeting convenes.

Once the group is unified about the assignment objectives and time frame, it is vital to predetermine the type of note-taking required of each group member (which may vary) and the variety of information exchange. The more systematic a group is in these two areas, the more unified the process and the product. The system begins with each group member writing down the message, specific purpose, and central ideas for the group presentation. If these are still to be determined, then have each group member identify the areas of background information needed and basic information gathering. Next, simply create a general format for note-taking—whether typed or handwritten and what types of details should be included especially sources. Also with the increasing use of electronic databases be very clear on when related articles should be forwarded to group members. The email inbox flooded with PDF files is not always a welcome situation.

The group should be clear on the explicit requirements for locating recent, relevant, and audience-appropriate source material for the presentation. All of this leads to the foundation of clearly defining the responsibilities of each group member. All tasks should be listed, given deadlines, and assigned people. A means for tracking the progress of each task should be outlined. The group should be clear on what are individual, joint (involving more than one group member), and entire group tasks. Throughout the entire process, all group members should be supportive and helpful but should not offer to do other people's work.

ORGANIZING FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

Organizing for your audience relates to how the gathered content can be best arranged for them. According to Patricia Fripp (2011), a Hall of Fame keynote speaker and executive speech coach, any presentation can be intimidating but the key is to remember "your goal is to present the most valuable information possible to the members of the audience" (p. 16). Now what you think is most valuable and what the audience thinks is most valuable must be coordinated because of differences in perception (the process by which we give meaning to our experience). Therefore, organizing for your audience is focused on content, structure, packaging, and human element—not for you, not for the assignment, but for the audience. A customized plan of organization will assist your group in creating relevant messages that satisfy others' personal needs and goals (Keller, 1983).

CONTENT

Audience members are interested in your expertise that has been developed from solid research and preparation. Audience members may have expectations about what foundational literature and key sources should be contained within your presentation. Therefore as a group, you need to go

beyond providing a variety of supporting material within your presentation to considering who will be present, levels of expertise, and their expectations. In general, organizing the content should be focused on usage, knowledge levels, and objectives. First, *usage* refers to how audience members expect to use your presentational content which will help the group transform ideas into audience-centered speech points. Second, *knowledge level* means the audience's knowledge level about the topic within the audience which assists the group in developing supporting material for the entire audience. Third, the *objectives* are linked to how the content serves the audience's needs and assists the group in being intentional about helping the audience see the reason for their involvement and receive value for the time they devoted to attend. Overall, the content is coordinated in a way that keeps at the forefront who the decision-makers are and what specifics they need to know, would be nice to know, and do not need to know.

STRUCTURE

Next professionally packaging a presentation for the audience deals with the structure or how you arrange points. The structure takes into consideration a strong opening, logical order, relevant key points, conciseness, and use of supplementary visual aids. In addition, the linking of points involves conversational language and the appropriate use of acronyms and technical jargon for inclusion or exclusion. The focus is geared to the perception of trustworthiness. Three strategic questions to answer include:

1. What qualities as a group will demonstrate your trustworthiness to this audience?
2. What content order needs to be achieved to give a consistent perception of fairness?
3. What content requires repeating and how should that be achieved—through comparisons, examples, illustrations, etc.?

PACKAGING

The packaging of successful group presentations revolves around the type of relationship with the audience, the division of time, and enthusiasm. An important dynamic of group presentations is for your group to know if audience members will be required to give an internal presentation or briefing from your presentation. As a group, know if you are packaging a one-time presentation, bidding for a long-term relationship, continuing a relationship for offering expertise, or if the presentation is tied to internal pressures to performance appraisals. Such knowledge will aid your group in developing talking points which can be re-presented with accuracy.

The type of presentation will help you divide the time for your presentation. The majority of the time is always spent on the body of the speech. A typical 30-minute speech might be divided into four minutes for the introduction, ten minutes for the body, and four minutes for the conclusion. The remaining 12 minutes is for the audience to ask questions, offer objections, or simply to become part of the discussion. It is important to leave enough time for the audience to contribute to the intellectual content. Therefore, always design group presentations with the intent not to run out of time before the audience can participate. All group presentations should have enthusiasm. Group members should be enthusiastic about the audience, message, and occasion. Planned enthusiasm

should play a role in creating the introduction, conclusion, and body of your presentations. The consistent use of enthusiasm can be planned throughout the speech outline.

HUMAN ELEMENT

Now it is time to focus on compatibility. As a group, consider what will it take to get this audience to pay attention to your presentation. Answer questions such as:

1. What can your group do to develop an introduction, transitions, and conclusions in a way to connect with this audience?
2. What types of stories are common or relatable to this audience?
3. What are the attitudes, beliefs, and values of this audience?

DELIVERING YOUR PRESENTATION AS ONE

By completing the other levels of coordination, the group will have decided on the key message, thoroughly researched the supporting material, developed logical conclusions, and created realistic recommendations. Therefore all that stands between you and success is the actual presentation—the vehicle that carries the facts and the ideas to your audience. Here it is important to recognize that if an assignment required both a written document and an oral presentation then be sure one effectively complements the other. Although you can reference the written document during the oral presentation, the oral presentation should be planned with the thought in mind that not everyone is given the written document. Therefore, the oral presentation may be the only content they receive. Since you will not always know who receives the written document, it is best to coordinate the presentation as if no one has the full written document, which can serve as a reference tool for gaining content requiring further explanation or accessibility to detailed information. At the same time, if the entire audience is provided written material keep in mind different decision-makers may be in the audience. For example, the creative director may be only interested in your creative concepts, whereas a vice president of finance may be only interested in figures.

The presentation preparation primarily focuses on your group's ability to develop a clear plan and execution of delivery. A delivery plan includes essential elements such as (1) purpose, (2) oral content, (3) dress, (4) room, (5) visuals, (6) delivery, and (7) rehearsal to ensure that the group presentation is both captivating and useful to your audience, as well as worth their time.

PURPOSE

Group members should keep at the forefront of their minds the answer to the question "Was the general purpose—to inform or to persuade—achieved?" As a group, practice keeping the purpose of the presentation explicit for the audience. The purpose should never become hidden during the presentation. Each group member's awareness of the purpose is important in maintaining the right kind of delivery. It is possible to have great content for a presentation and miss the entire purpose of the presentation. For example, say your group had been asked to do a presentation about Facebook and how it could be used in the financial industry. You could take an informative or persuasive approach. However, if the audience—banking professionals—attends a presentation where

the content is focused on Facebook rather than having a focus on its use in the financial industry, then the purpose was not achieved.

The delivery plan will help you evaluate if the purpose of the presentation is clearly aimed at the primary audience. In addition, the group can determine when and how clearly they are articulating the explicit purpose of the presentation. The purpose is complemented by a clear preview, the audience members' awareness of what decisions are at issue, and the audience's desire to get important information first.

ORAL CONTENT

Up to this point the majority of the group's engagement with the content has been in terms of reading and writing. It is time to orally interact with the selected content to ensure that it has been developed for *this* audience, properly structured, and clearly articulated. The delivery plan is a time to evaluate word choice, idioms, and antidotes. When working with this content, make sure that it is suited to the purpose, and that the key message is explicit so the audience remembers it well.

The introduction of group members, transitions, and internal summaries are all important elements of the delivery plan. A proper introduction of group members and the content will not happen automatically. Therefore, it is important to practice it to determine if introductions fit better at the beginning of the presentation, if names need to be emphasized through the wearing of name tags, or if names are better used as a part of transition content. The use of name only may not be effective in some speaking situations. Therefore, the group needs to determine what a proper group member introduction includes beyond the name. Plus, be consistent; that is, determine if everyone is using first name only or full name, do they need to know your positions, some background, or can you simply state it in a written format such as a team resume. Speech content is not useful if the audience does not accept your credibility.

DRESS

As in all presentations, an awareness of your physical appearance is an important element in complementing the content of your speech. Do not hesitate to talk about and practice appropriate dress as a group. It is important to look like a group. Really consider defining a group's speaking uniform by deciding how formal or informal the dress code is.

As a group, the overall question you want to be able to answer is: *Did our dress provide an accurate first impression not distracting from the content? So what kinds of things can be distracting?* The most common are colors, busy patterns, and large or clinking jewelry. As a group determine what type of dress is effective in coordinating your group's credibility. It is important to take into consideration cultural, occupational, and regional norms. In addition, it is important to think about branding choices. Often groups want to brand themselves for the audience. It is not necessary to mimic your audience. For example, a sales presentation to cranberry association members may entice a group to wear red. However, the cranberry association may not be the only sale your group needs to make so you will be forced to ask the question: Will each sales presentation audience determine the color we accent in dress? In short, do not let the speaking occasion brand you. Simply know what is considered

professional for this presentation. You have spent a lot of time on preparing the content for this audience so do not detract from it.

FACILITIES

It is not always feasible to practice your delivery in the actual room where you will deliver your speech. However, it is extremely important that you actively plan your delivery for the room by recreating the speaking environment. If prior access to the room is not available, then you will need to do your planning by asking a series of questions of the presentation planner. Some common things to find out include the size of the room; if a projector is available and its location within the room; is there a platform and/or a stationary lectern; is there a sound system and how many microphones; where the group will be seated before being introduced; will the presentation be recorded; what is the availability of the room in advance of the presentation; and what is the number of seats and seating arrangement so the group can plan for the zone of interaction.

When preparing for a group presentation, it is important to know what the facilities are like prior to your presentation to plan for how you will deliver the presentation and what visual aids might be possible. (Credit: Wiki4des at English Wikipedia/DMI conference/CC BY 3.0)

VISUALS

The term visuals refers to both non-technology visual aids (handouts, posters, charts, etc.) and presentation technology. Visuals should not appear as though several individuals made them but rather as uniform to the group's presentation. All visuals should blend smoothly into the speech. All

group members should be clear on what visuals or documents were pre-requested (so you do not eliminate them as unnecessary during rehearsal). Many times it is better to simply project or display visuals. At other times, visuals may need to be assembled in a presentation packet for all audience members. Bohn & Jabusch (1982) suggest that there are several researched-based reasons why visual aids enhance presentations including (a) *enhanced understanding*—helps audience comprehend what they hear and see; (b) *enhanced memory*—serves as a visual reinforcement; (c) enhanced organization—visually displays your organizational strategy; (d) *enhanced attention*—grabs and maintains audience interest; and (e) *enhanced sequencing*—shows rather than describes.

DELIVERY

The four modes of delivery—memorized, impromptu, manuscript, and extemporaneous—are all valuable in group presentations. However, the most common mode of delivery is extemporaneous. Earlier in the chapter, developing a script was discussed. The step of transforming the script into a **delivery outline**—an abbreviated version of the preparation outline (DiSanza & Legge, 2011)—is a significant part of planning delivery. The ultimate goal is to figure out how the group can be confident that the entire presentation stays together and does not just exist in pieces. The delivery outline may go as far as to stipulate vocal and gesture instructions. The delivery outline is not created to be read from, therefore, the group also should determine how speaker notes will be used. The delivery outline should be provided to every group member so everyone is familiar with the entire presentation. It is important to set up contingency plans for who will present content if someone is absent on the day of the presentation—the presenter who gets stuck in morning traffic or the professional who had a flight delay.

The key is for all group members to remain conversational in their delivery style. This may be best achieved by utilizing effective delivery strategies such as appropriate gestures, movement, and posture; appropriate facial expressions including eye contact; and appropriate vocal delivery—articulation, dialect, pitch, pronunciation, rate, and volume. Group members should evaluate each other on audibility and fluency.

REHEARSAL

Rehearsals are for the final polishing of your presentations. It is a time to solidify logistics of how many group members are presenting, where they will stand, and the most appropriate transitions between each speaker. Group members should grow more comfortable with each other through rehearsals. A key aspect of polishing involves identifying gaps in content and gaining feedback on content (oral and visual), style, and delivery. The rehearsals are a good time to refine speaker notes and to practice the time limit. The number of scheduled rehearsals is dependent on your group and the amount of preparation time provided. The most important element for the group is to adapt their rehearsal timetable based on an honest evaluation of the speaking skills represented within the group.

The only part of a group presentation that you may not be able to rehearse is responding to the *actual* audience members' questions and objections. However, you can anticipate the types of questions and practice a simple strategy of how you will respond—repeating the question, stating who from the group will respond, and answering succinctly. Four of the most common types of questions

are follow-up questions; action-oriented questions focused on what would you do if; hypothetical questions focused on different scenarios; and information-seeking questions. A primary way to practice is to think of at least three questions you would like to answer, prepare the answer, and practice it during rehearsal(s).

CONCLUSION

The foundation of a group presentation is constructed from all the guidelines you use in an individual presentation coupled with additional strategies for working effectively with others. Group presentations primarily entail group communication, planning, organization, and delivery. Effective groups communicate about interaction roles, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Such communication helps the group reflect on group dynamics, customize communication for *this* speaking group, and establish a unified commitment and collaborative climate.

Review & Reflection Questions

- How might a group presentation be different than presenting individually?
- In preparing for a group presentation, what are some key questions and considerations for your group?
- How can you ensure your group presentation is effective and appears 'as one'?

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This content comes from the introduction, "Preparing All Parts of the Assignment" and "Delivering Your Presentation as One" written by Jennifer F. Wood, Ph.D., in Chapter 18 Group Presentations.

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APPENDIX A - PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

Professional communication in written form requires skill and expertise. From text messages to reports, how you represent yourself with the written word counts. Writing in an online environment requires tact, skill, and an awareness that what you write may be there forever. From memos to letters, from business proposals to press releases, your written business communication represents you and your group. Your goal is to make it clear, concise, and professional.

TEXT, E-MAIL, AND NETIQUETTE

Text messages and e-mails are part of our communication landscape, and skilled business communicators consider them a valuable tool to connect. Netiquette refers to etiquette, or protocols and norms for communication, on the Internet.

TEXTING

Whatever digital device you use, written communication in the form of brief messages, or texting, has become a common way to connect. It is useful for short exchanges, and is a convenient way to stay connected with others when talking on the phone would be cumbersome. Texting is not useful for long or complicated messages, and careful consideration should be given to the audience. Although texting will not be used in this class as a form of professional communication, you should be aware of several of the principles that should guide your writing in this context.

When texting, always consider your audience and your company and choose words, terms, or abbreviations that will deliver your message appropriately and effectively.

Tips for effective business texting

- **Know your recipient:** "? % dsct" may be an understandable way to ask a close associate what the proper discount is to offer a certain customer, but if you are writing a text to your boss, it might be wiser to write, "What % discount does Murray get on $1K order?"
- **Anticipate unintentional misinterpretation.** Texting often uses symbols and codes to represent thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Given the complexity of communication, and the useful but limited tool of texting, be aware of its limitation and prevent misinterpretation with brief messages.
- **Contacting someone too frequently can border on harassment.** Texting is a tool. Use it when appropriate but don't abuse it.

- **Don't text and drive.** Research shows that the likelihood of an accident increases dramatically if the driver is texting behind the wheel ("Deadly distraction," 2009). Being in an accident while conducting company business would reflect poorly on your judgment as well as on your employer.

E-MAIL

E-mail is familiar to most students and workers. It may be used like text, or synchronous chat, and it can be delivered to a cell phone. In business, it has largely replaced print hard copy letters for external (outside the company) correspondence, and in many cases, it has taken the place of memos for internal (within the company) communication (Guffey, 2008). E-mail can be very useful for messages that have slightly more content than a text message, but it is still best used for fairly brief messages. Many businesses use automated e-mails to acknowledge communications from the public, or to remind associates that periodic reports or payments are due. You may also be assigned to "populate" a form e-mail in which standard paragraphs are used but you choose from a menu of sentences to make the wording suitable for a particular transaction.

E-mails may be informal in personal contexts, but business communication requires attention to detail, awareness that your e-mail reflects you and your company, and a professional tone so that it may be forwarded to any third party if needed. E-mail often serves to exchange information within organizations. Although e-mail may have an informal feel, remember that when used for business, it needs to convey professionalism and respect. Never write or send anything that you wouldn't want read in public or front of your company president.

Tips for Effective Business E-mails

As with all writing, professional communications require attention to the specific writing context, and it may surprise you that even elements of form can indicate a writer's strong understanding of the audience and purpose. The principles explained here apply to the educational context as well; use them when communicating with your instructors and classroom peers.

- **Open with a proper salutation**. Proper salutations demonstrate respect and avoid mix-ups in case a message is accidentally sent to the wrong recipient. For example, use a salutation like "Dear Ms. X" (external) or "Hi Barry" (internal).
- **Include a clear, brief, and specific subject line**. This helps the recipient understand the essence of the message. For example, "Proposal attached" or "Your question of 10/25."
- **Close with a signature**. Identify yourself by creating a signature block that automatically contains your name and business contact information.
- **Avoid abbreviations**. An e-mail is not a text message, and the audience may not find your wit cause to ROTFLOL (roll on the floor laughing out loud).
- **Be brief**. Omit unnecessary words.
- **Use a good format**. Divide your message into brief paragraphs for ease of reading. A good e-mail should get to the point and conclude in three small paragraphs or less.

- **Reread, revise, and review**. Catch and correct spelling and grammar mistakes before you press "send." It will take more time and effort to undo the problems caused by a hasty, poorly written e-mail than to get it right the first time.
- **Reply promptly**. Watch out for an emotional response—never reply in anger—but make a habit of replying to all e-mails within twenty-four hours, even if only to say that you will provide the requested information in forty-eight or seventy-two hours.
- **Use "Reply All" sparingly**. Do not send your reply to everyone who received the initial e-mail unless your message absolutely needs to be read by the entire group.
- **Avoid using all caps**. Capital letters are used on the Internet to communicate emphatic emotion or yelling and are considered rude.
- **Test links**. If you include a link, test it to make sure it is working.
- **E-mail ahead of time if you are going to attach large files** (audio and visual files are often quite large) to prevent exceeding the recipient's mailbox limit or triggering the spam filter.
- **Give feedback or follow up**. If you don't get a response in twenty-four hours, e-mail or call. Spam filters may have intercepted your message, so your recipient may never have received it.

```
From:                Steve Jobs <sjobs@apple.com>
To:                Human Resources Division <hr@apple.com>
Date:                September 12, 2015
Subject:        Safe Zone Training
```

Dear Colleagues:

Please consider signing up for the next available Safe Zone workshop offered by the College. As you know, our department is working toward increasing the number of Safe Zone volunteers in our area, and I hope several of you may be available for the next workshop scheduled for Friday, October 9.

For more information on the Safe Zone program, please visit http://www.cocc.edu/multicultural/safe-zone-training/

Please let me know if you will attend.

Steve Jobs
CEO Apple Computing
sjobs@apple.com

Figure 1. *Sample email*

NETIQUETTE

We create personal pages, post messages, and interact via social media and other online platforms as a normal part of our careers and everyday life, but how we conduct ourselves can leave a lasting image, literally. The photograph you posted on your Facebook page or Twitter feed may have been seen by your potential employer, or that nasty remark in a post may come back to haunt you later.

Following several guidelines for online postings, as detailed below, can help you avoid embarrassment later.

Know your Context

- Introduce yourself.
- Avoid assumptions about your readers. Remember that culture influences communication style and practices.
- Familiarize yourself with policies on Acceptable Use of IT Resources at your organization.

Remember the Human

- Remember there is a person behind the words. Ask for clarification before making a judgment.
- Check your tone before you publish.
- Respond to people using their names.
- Remember that culture and even gender can play a part in how people communicate.
- Remain authentic and expect the same of others.
- Remember that people may not reply immediately. People participate in different ways, some just by reading the communication rather than jumping into it.
- Avoid jokes and sarcasm; they often don't translate well to the online environment.

Recognize that Text Online is Permanent

- Be judicious. What you say online is difficult to retract later.
- Consider your responsibility to the group and the working environment.
- Agree on ground rules for text communication (formal or informal; seek clarification whenever needed, etc) if you are working collaboratively.

Research Before You React

- Accept and forgive mistakes.
- Seek clarification before reacting.
- Ask your supervisor for guidance.

Respect Privacy and Original Ideas

- Quote the original author if you are responding to a specific point made by someone else.
- Ask the author of an email for permission before forwarding the communication.

Sometimes, online behavior can appear so disrespectful and even hostile that it requires attention and follow up. In this case, let your supervisor know right away so that the right resources can be called upon to help.

MEMORANDUMS

A memo (or memorandum, meaning "reminder") is normally used for communicating policies, procedures, or related official business within an organization. It is often written from a one-to-all perspective (like mass communication), broadcasting a message to an audience, rather than one-on-one, interpersonal communication. It may also be used to update a team on activities for a given project or to inform a specific group within a company of an event, action, or observance.

MEMO PURPOSE

A memo's purpose is often to inform, but it occasionally includes an element of persuasion or a call to action. All organizations have informal and formal communication networks. The unofficial, informal communication network within an organization is often called the grapevine, and it is often characterized by rumor, gossip, and innuendo. On the grapevine, one person may hear that someone else is going to be laid off and start passing the news around. Rumors change and transform as they are passed from person to person, and before you know it, the word is that they are shutting down your entire department.

One effective way to address informal, unofficial speculation is to spell out clearly for all employees what is going on with a particular issue. If budget cuts are a concern, then it may be wise to send a memo explaining the imminent changes. If a company wants employees to take action, they may also issue a memorandum. For example, on February 13, 2009, upper management at the Panasonic Corporation issued a declaration that all employees should buy at least $1,600 worth of Panasonic products. The company president noted that if everyone supported the company with purchases, it would benefit all (Lewis, 2009).

While memos do not normally include a call to action that requires personal spending, they often represent the business or organization's interests. They may also include statements that align business and employee interest and underscore common ground and benefit.

MEMO FORMAT

A memo has a header that clearly indicates who sent it and who the intended recipients are. Pay particular attention to the title of the individual(s) in this section. Date and subject lines are also present, followed by a message that contains a declaration, a discussion, and a summary.

In a standard writing format, we might expect to see an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. All these are present in a memo, and each part has a clear purpose. The declaration in the opening uses a declarative sentence to announce the main topic. The discussion elaborates or lists major points associated with the topic, and the conclusion serves as a summary. Figure 2 provides a sample memo using the format explained above.

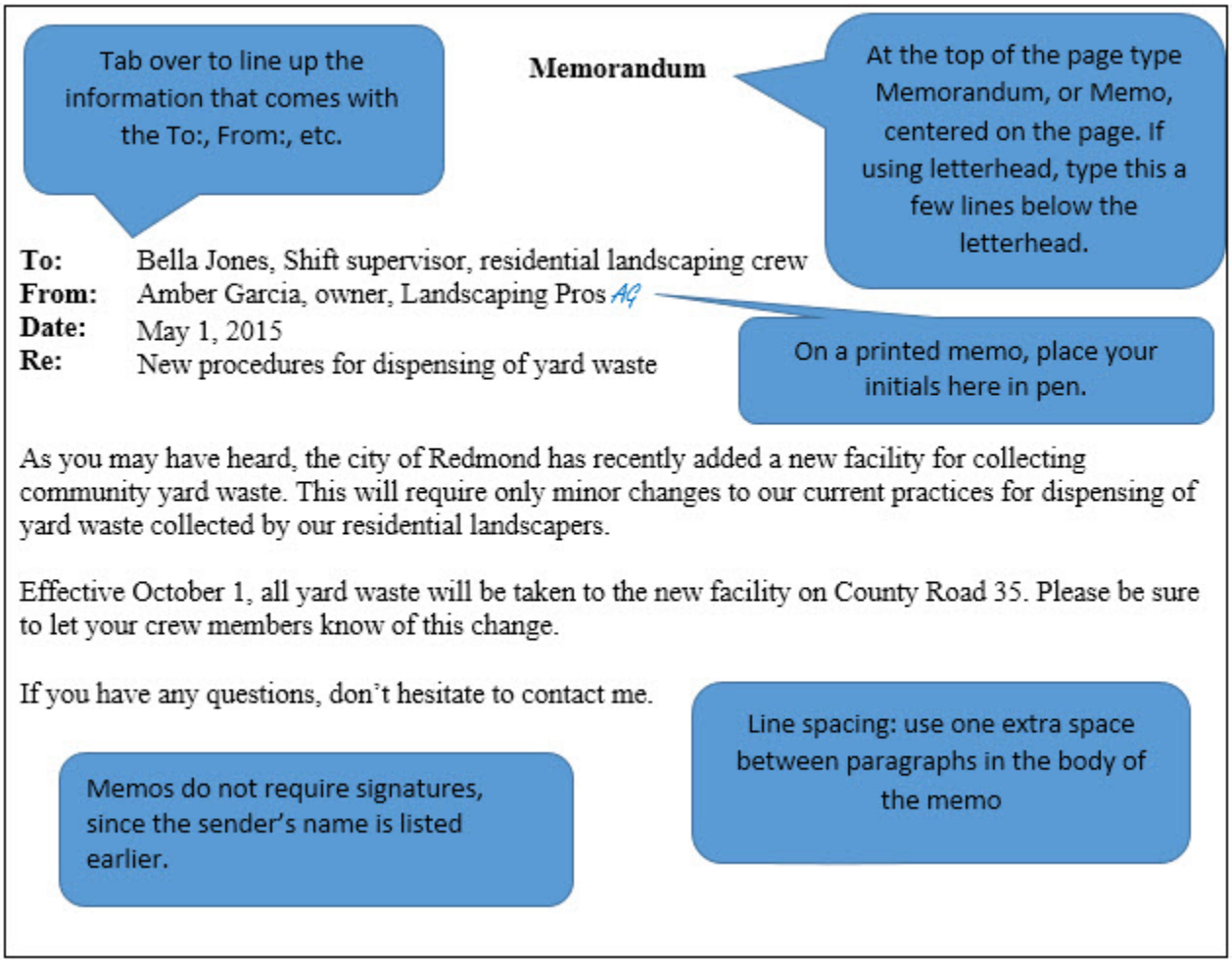

Figure 2: *Sample memo (Click image for an accessible PDF)*

FIVE TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE BUSINESS MEMOS

Audience orientation

Always consider the audience and their needs when preparing a memo. An acronym or abbreviation that is known to management may not be known by all the employees of the organization, and if the memo is to be posted and distributed within the organization, the goal is clear and concise communication at all levels with no ambiguity.

Professional, formal tone

Memos are often announcements, and the person sending the memo speaks for a part or all of the organization. While it may contain a request for feedback, the announcement itself is linear, from the organization to the employees. The memo may have legal standing as it often reflects policies or procedures, and may reference an existing or new policy in the employee manual, for example.

Subject emphasis

The subject is normally declared in the subject line and should be clear and concise. If the memo is

announcing the observance of a holiday, for example, the specific holiday should be named in the subject line—for example, use "Thanksgiving weekend schedule" rather than "holiday observance."

Direct format

Some written business communication allows for a choice between direct and indirect formats, but memorandums are always direct. The purpose is clearly announced.

Objectivity

Memos are a place for just the facts and should have an objective tone without personal bias, preference, or interest on display. Avoid subjectivity.

LETTERS

Letters are brief messages sent to recipients that are often outside the organization. They are often printed on letterhead paper and represent the business or organization in one or two pages. Shorter messages may include e-mails or memos, either hard copy or electronic, while reports tend to be three or more pages in length. While e-mail and text messages may be used more frequently today, the effective business letter remains a common form of written communication. It can serve to introduce you to a potential employer, announce a product or service, or even serve to communicate feelings and emotions. We'll examine the basic outline of a letter and then focus on specific products or writing assignments.

All writing assignments have expectations in terms of language and format. The audience or readers may have their own ideas of what constitutes a specific type of letter, and your organization may have its own format and requirements. This chapter outlines common elements across letters, and attention should be directed to the expectations associated with your particular writing assignment. There are many types of letters, and many adaptations in terms of form and content, but in this chapter, we discuss the fifteen elements of a traditional block-style letter. Letters may serve to introduce your skills and qualifications to prospective employers, deliver important or specific information, or serve as documentation of an event or decision. Figure 3 demonstrates a cover letter that might introduce a technical report to its recipient.

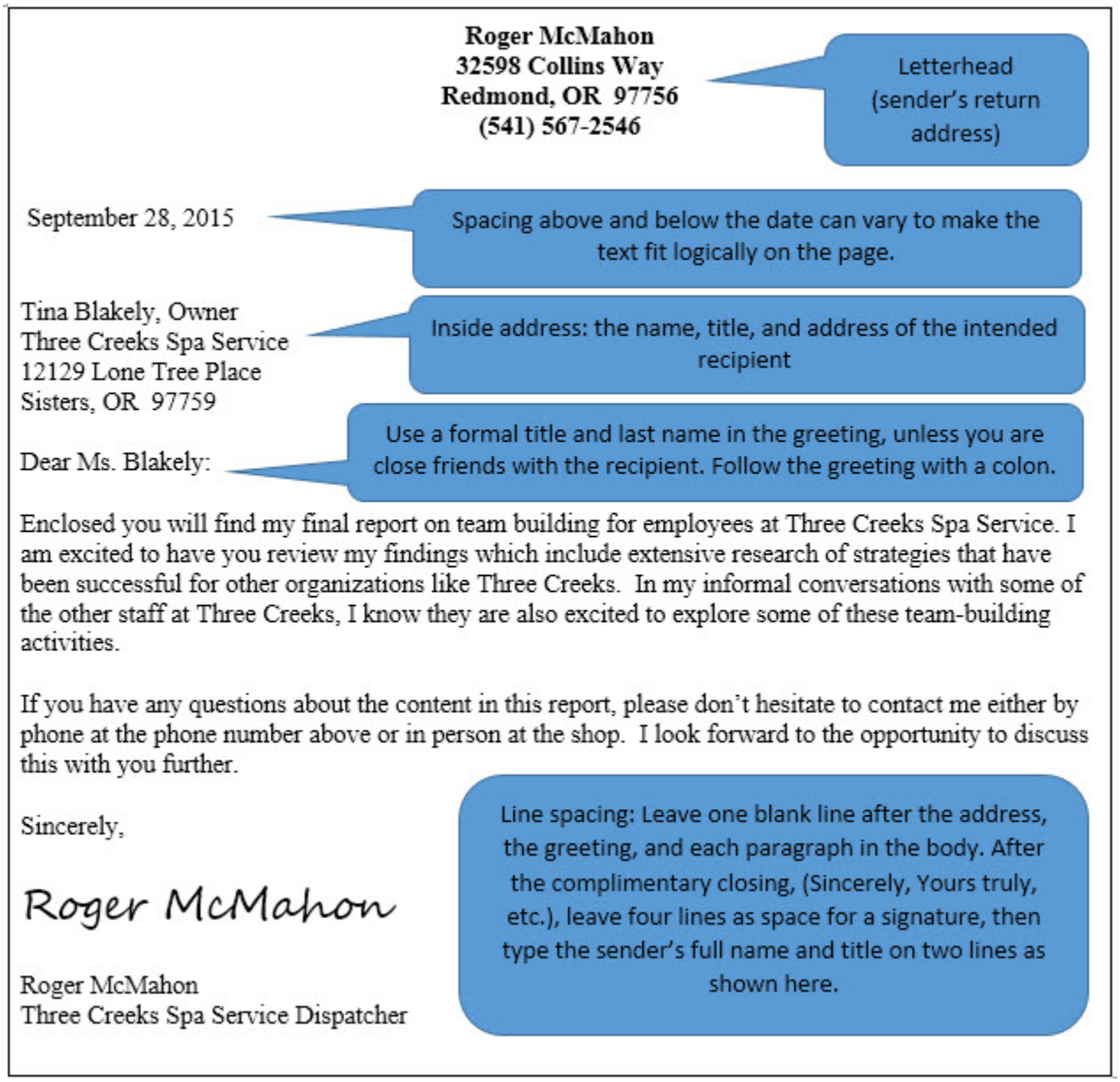

Figure 3: *Sample cover letter (Click for PDF)*

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE LETTERS

Remember that a letter has five main areas:

1. The heading, which names the recipient, often including the address and date
2. The introduction, which establishes the purpose
3. The body, which articulates the message
4. The conclusion, which restates the main point and may include a call to action
5. The signature line, which sometimes includes the contact information

Always remember that letters represent you and your company in your absence. To communicate effectively and project a positive image, remember that:

- your language should be clear, concise, specific, and respectful;
- each word should contribute to your purpose;
- each paragraph should focus on one idea;
- the parts of the letter should form a complete message;
- the letter should be free of errors.

LETTERS WITH SPECIFIC PURPOSES

Cover letters. When you send a report or some other document to your supervisor, send it with a cover letter that briefly explains the purpose of the report and your major findings. Although your supervisor may have authorized the project and received periodic updates from you, s/he probably has many other employees and projects going and would benefit from a reminder about your work.

Letters of inquiry. You may want to request information about a company or organization such as whether they anticipate job openings in the near future or whether they fund grant proposals from non-profit groups. In this case, you would send a letter of inquiry, asking for additional information. As with most business letters, keep your request brief, introducing yourself in the opening paragraph and then clearly stating your purpose and/or request in the second paragraph. If you need very specific information, consider placing your requests in list form for clarity. Conclude in a friendly way that shows appreciation for the help you will receive.

Job application letters. Whether responding to job announcements online or on paper, you are likely to write a job application letter introducing yourself and your skills to a potential employer. This letter often sets the first impression of you, so demonstrate professionalism in your format, language use, and proofreading of your work. Depending on the type of job you are seeking, application letters will vary in length and content. In business, letters are typically no more than one page and simply highlight skills and qualifications that appear in an accompanying resume. In education, letters are typically more fully developed and contain a more detailed discussion of the applicant's experience and how that experience can benefit the institution. These letters provide information that is not necessarily evident in an enclosed resume or curriculum vitae.

Follow-up letters. Any time you have made a request of someone, write a follow-up letter expressing your appreciation for the time your letter recipient has taken to respond to your needs or consider your job application. If you have had a job interview, the follow-up letter thanking the interviewer for his/her time is especially important for demonstrating your professionalism and attention to detail.

Letters within the professional context may take on many other purposes, but these four types of letters are some of the most common that you will encounter. For additional examples of professional letters, take a look at the sample letters provided by David McMurrey in his online textbook on technical writing.

REFERENCES

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- Lewis, L. (2009, February 13). Panasonic orders staff to buy £1,000 in products. Retrieved from http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/markets/japan/article5723942.ece

AUTHOR & ATTRIBUTION

This appendix is adapted from Professional Communications in Technical Writing by Annemarie Hamlin, Chris Rubio, Michele DeSilva. This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

APPENDIX B - CITING SOURCES IN APA STYLE

In writing, you should cite your sources using the style indicated by your instructor or organization. You'll find that different disciplines have different styles. Many of you may be familiar with MLA. In this class and many of your other Communication courses, we use APA. That is because APA style prioritizes dates. Dates are helpful to us because they indicate the recency of the information and can relate to its quality.

In your written assignments, you should (1) cite your sources in-text when information comes from a source (whether summarized, paraphrased, or a direct quote) **and** (2) list your sources in a references section at the end of your paper.

Here is the basic format in APA style:

REFERENCE PAGE

Any sources referenced should be listed on their own page at the end of a paper. You should title the page "References." Your references should be then listed in alphabetical order. References should have a hanging indent of 0.5, which means that they are indented after the first line.

Below are some common reference types:

- *Peer-reviewed journal*
    - Lastname, Initials. (Year). Title of the article. *Journal Name, Volume*(Issue), Pages. doi or url
- *News article:*
    - Lastname, Initials. (Year, Month Date). Title of the article. *Source Name*. url
- *Book*
    - Lastname, Initials. (Year). *Title*. Publisher.
- *Organization Website (With organization as author)*
    - Organization Name. (Year, Month Date). *Title of webpage*. url.

Can't find a date? Then you use n.d. in place of the date. Make sure you double check around the website or article though. Most often when students tell me there is no date, I go to the website and quickly locate it.

Another common mistake I see is related to capitalization in article titles. Only the first word and any proper nouns should be capitalized in article titles in your references. For more types of references and examples see: "Reference Examples."

Lastly, be careful of online generators for references. You can use them as a start, but you still need to generally know what to look for to correct them.

IN-TEXT CITATIONS

There are two primary ways you can cite sources in-text. Anytime you are referring to information that came from a source — whether a direct quote, a paraphrase, or summary — you should cite the source. I encourage you to over-cite rather than under-cite.

Common formats include:

- **Parenthetical citation:** At the end of the sentence (Smith, 2018).
- **Narrative citation**: If you want to write it into the sentence, you might say something like Smith (2018) stated…

When you are using a direct quote, you should also include a page number at the end of the sentence if applicable. That might look like this (p. 2). For online sources that do not have page numbers, APA style recommends either paragraph numbers, section headers, or both. The period always goes after the citation.

If you are using a quote that is longer than 40 words, it needs to be inset. I strongly encourage you to avoid lengthy quotes as much as possible.

For more on in-text citations see: "Basic Principles: Parenthetical Versus Narrative In-Text Citations."

FURTHER RESOURCES

- APA In-Text Citations
- APA Reference Examples
- Purdue OWL APA Style Guide

GLOSSARY

achievement-oriented leadership
a leaderships style in which leaders set challenging goals, seek improvement in performance, emphasize excellence, and demonstrate confidence in organizational members' ability to attain high standards

affinity technique
a brainstorming technique that uses Post-it notes for individuals to first write down ideas and then asks the group to categorize them

agenda
a list of topics to be discussed at a meeting

bases of power
five primary ways in which power can be exerted in social situations

blogs
web pages with periodic posts that may or may not feature feedback responses from readers

brainstorming
a commonly used group creativity technique designed to generate a large number of ideas for the solution of a problem

cloud computing
secure access of files from anywhere, as information is stored remotely

coercive power
person A has power over person B because A can administer some form of punishment to B

collective self-esteem
feelings of self-worth that are based on evaluation of relationships with others and membership in social groups

collectivist cultures
cultures that place more value on the needs and goals of the group, family, community or nation

community
a physical or virtual space where people seeking interaction and shared interest come together to pursue their mutual goals, objectives, and shared values

conflict
an expressed struggle between interdependent parties over goals which they perceive as incompatible or resources which they perceive to be insufficient

conformity pressure
internal and external pressures to accept rather than resist group norms

consensus
a method of group decision-making where group members engage in discussion and reach a decision that all members can support

coordination
harmonious combination or interaction, as of functions or parts

counterpower
the extent to which person B has other sources of power to buffer the effects of person A's power

creative problem solving
the process of creating a solution to a problem wherein the solution has value or is appreciated by those directly affected and demonstrates newness or novelty

creative thought
a mental process involving creative problem solving and the discovery of new ideas or concepts, or new associations of the existing ideas or concepts, fueled by the process of either conscious or unconscious insight

creativity techniques
methods that promote original thoughts by facilitating divergent and/or convergent thinking

cultural intelligence
a competency and a skill that enables individuals to function effectively in cross-cultural environments

cultural racism
deeming another group's culture as inferior, including its language

debate
a structured argument in which participants speak for or against a pre-announced proposition

decision by expert
a method of group decision-making where the group defers to the member who has the most expertise or experience or to someone outside the group with the authority to make decisions

defensive communication
: communication behavior which occurs when an individual perceives threat or anticipates threat in the group

delivery outline
: an abbreviated version of the preparation outline

descriptive models
: models of group development help us make sense of our group experiences by describing what might be 'normal' or 'typical' group processes. They reflect common patterns researchers have observed in groups

designated leaders
: leaders who are officially recognized in their leadership role and may be appointed or elected by people inside or outside the group

directed brainstorming
: a brainstorming technique that uses criteria to intentionally constrain the ideation process and involves writing and then exchanging ideas through multiple rounds to improve upon ideas

directive leadership
: a leadership style in which the leader sets goals and performance expectations, lets organizational members know what is expected, provides guidance, establishes rules and procedures to guide work, and schedules and coordinates the activities of members

disenfranchised
: exploited and victimized in a variety of ways by agents of oppression and/or systems and institutions

electronic brainstorming
: a brainstorming technique that relies on digital tools to collect ideas

emergent approach
: an approach to studying leadership considers how leaders emerge in groups that are initially leaderless and how situational contexts affect this process

emergent leaders
: leaders who gain status and respect through engagement with the group and its task and are turned to by others as a resource when leadership is needed. These leaders may not be officially appointed or elected as leaders but come to be seen as leaders by the group

empowerment
: Having control over resources in such a way that they can be used to reward and punish various people and having the ability to control barriers to participation through defining what we talk about and how we talk about it. It is a force that shapes shared consciousness through myths, ideology, and control of information

expert power
person A gains power because A has knowledge or expertise relevant to B

feminine cultures
cultures that tend to value nurturing, care and emotion, and are concerned with the quality of life

formative assessment
evaluating the meeting or activity prior to or as it takes place, allowing people to modify their behavior in response to its results

forming stage
a stage of group development in which group members experience uncertainty and seek to get to know each other

forum
a presentation in which one or more experts may be questioned by a panel of other experts, journalists, and/or the audience

functional approach
an approach to studying leadership that focuses on how particular communication behaviors function to create the conditions of leadership

general norms
the generally accepted rules of behavior for all group members

group climate
the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members

group cohesion
the degree to which group members identify with and like the group's task and other group members

group passing technique
a brainstorming technique in which a person in a circular group writes down one idea, then passes the piece of paper to the next person in a clockwise direction who adds some thoughts and continues to to pass the paper to the next member. Ideas are built upon and make it all the way around the group before they are discussed out loud

group roles
expected behaviors or functions of group members

group socialization
the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors

grouphate
feelings of dread and discomfort experienced when confronted with the possibility of working in groups or teams

groupthink
group pressure where members may remain silent and seek to avoid conflict and decisions are made based on the faulty assumption that the group is in agreement

gunnysacking
the imaginary bag we all carry, into which we place unresolved conflicts or grievances over time leading to frustration and influencing how we interpret actions

high-context communication
a culture that emphasize nonverbal communication and indirect communication styles

high-power distance culture
culture tends to accept power differences, encourage hierarchy, and show respect for rank and authority

idea mapping method
a brainstorming technique that encourages associating or connecting words or ideas by creating network visualization

individualistic cultures
cultures that place greater importance on individual freedom and personal independence

innovation
is the process of both generating and applying creative ideas in some specific context

interactive writing platforms
platforms that have common documents stored on the Internet, which can be accessed from multiple sites at once

interdependence
the degree to which group members share a common purpose and common outcomes

leader
a group role that is associated with a high-status position and may be formally or informally recognized by group members

leadership
a complex of beliefs, communication patterns, and behaviors that influence the functioning of a group and move a group toward the completion of its task

legitimate power
person B submits to person A because B feels that A has a right to exert power in a certain domain

long-term orientation
cultures that focus on the future and delaying short-term success or gratification in order to achieve long-term success

low-context communication
a culture that emphasizes verbal expression and direct communication styles

low-power distance culture
cultures in which people relate to one another more as equals and less as a reflection of dominant or subordinate roles, regardless of their actual formal roles

maintenance roles
roles that function to create and maintain social cohesion and fulfill the interpersonal needs of group members

majority vote
a decision-making method where the decision is made by more than half of the group members agreeing

masculine cultures
cultures that tend to value assertiveness, and concentrate on material achievements and wealth-building

minutes
a written document that serves as a record of what happened in the meeting and can provide an opportunity for clarification

monochromatic time
an orientation to time where interruptions are to be avoided, and everything has its own specific time

negative roles
roles that can harm the group by either diverting attention away from the task at hand or making it difficult for the group to make progress

nominal group technique
a brainstorming technique where participants first write down their ideas before sharing them with the group

norming stage
a phase of group development when groups start to reach agreements, become more cohesive and establish ground rules (norms)

norms
expectations of group members, established by the group and can be conscious and formal, or unconscious and informal

organizational communication
the study of the communication context, environment, and interaction within an organization

ostracism
the deliberate exclusion from groups

panel
a presentation format that consists of a group of experts publicly discussing a topic among themselves

participative leadership
a leadership style in which the leader consults with group members about job-related activities and considers their opinions and suggestions when making decisions

path-goal theory of leadership
a leadership theory and approach that suggests that an effective leader provides organizational members with a path to a valued goal

perception check
checking in with meeting participants to see if you're interpreting nonverbal cues accurately

performing stage
a phase in group development when groups are operating at their peak with increased task effectiveness and problem solving

pitch
the frequency (high or low) of your voice

polychromatic time
an orientation to time where multiple things can be done at once and time is viewed more fluidly

power-from-within
power that is derived from a personal sense of strength or agency

power-with
power derived from the collective power of the group. This is a power "not to command, but to suggest and be listened to, to begin something and see it happen" (Starhawk, 1987, p. 10)

presentation outline
a full-sentence outline of virtually everything the speaker intends to say. The outline allows the speakers to test the structure, the logic, and persuasive appeals in the speech

primary groups
long-lasting groups that are formed based on relationships and include significant others. These are the small groups in which we interact most frequently

privilege
the benefits, advantages and power that are gained based on status or membership in a dominant group

problem-solving process
involves thoughts, discussions, actions, and decisions that occur from the first consideration of a problematic situation to the goal

procedural-related functions
leadership behaviors that help guide the group as it proceeds from idea generation to implementation

punctuated equilibrium
a model of group development that suggests that in groups remain relatively static for long periods of time and then change occurs in brief, punctuated bursts, generally catalyzed by a crisis or problem that breaks through the systemic inertia

purpose statement
a clear, agreed outcome for the presentation

quality
the emotional tone of your voice

question brainstorming
a brainstorming technique that involves generating questions rather than trying to come up with answers and short-term solutions

reachability
the way in which one member is or isn't connected to other group members

referent power
person B looks up to or admires person A, and, as a result, B follows A largely because of A's personal qualities, characteristics, or reputation

reflective thinking process
a five step process to aid in group problem solving involving (1) defining the problem, (2) analyzing the problem, (3) generating possible solutions, (4) evaluating solutions, and (5) implementing and assessing the solution

relational functions
leadership behaviors that contribute to creating a participative and inclusive climate, establishing norms of reflection and self-analysis, and managing conflict.

relational-oriented groups
groups formed to promote interpersonal connections and are more focused on quality interactions that contribute to the well-being of group members

reward power
person A has power over person B because A controls rewards that B wants

Ringlemann effect
identified by Ringlemann in 1913 the term refers to the tendency of individual productive to decrease as the size of a group increases. In other words, individuals tend to exert less effort when they are in a group than they would as individuals. This was one of the earlier observations of social loafing

role-specific norms
expectations that are specific to particular roles within a group

secondary groups
groups characterized by less frequent face-to-face interactions, less emotional and relational communication, and more task-related communication

self-centered roles
roles that divert attention from the task to the group member exhibiting the behavior. Examples include the central negative, monopolizer, self-confessor, insecure compliment seeker, and joker

shared mental model
knowledge, expectations, conceptualizations, and other cognitive representations that members of a group have in common pertaining to the group and its members, tasks, procedures, and resources

short-term orientation
focus on the near future, involves delivering short-term success or gratification and places a stronger emphasis on the present than the future

situational leadership
a theory and approach to leadership in which the leadership style or strategy varies based on the context as well as the motivation and competencies of group members

six thinking hats
a method of problem-solving developed by Edward de Bono that aims to help people get out of habitual ways of thinking and to allow group members to play different roles and see a problem or decision from multiple points of view

small group communication
interactions among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual influence, and a shared identity

social cohesion
the attraction and liking among group members

social comparison
the theory that people join with others to evaluate the accuracy of their personal beliefs and attitudes

social facilitation
the enhancement of an individual's performance when that person works in the presence of other people

social knowledge
information about behavioral norms that guide interaction

social loafing
members who contribute less to the group than other members or than they would if working alone. Social loafers expect that no one will notice their behaviors or that others will pick up their slack

sociometer model
a conceptual analysis of self-evaluation processes that theorizes self-esteem functions to psychologically monitor of one's degree of inclusion and exclusion in social groups

status
a person's perceived level of importance or significance within a particular context

storming phase
a phase of group development marked by conflict as group members struggle to explore their power and influence within the group

summative assessment
evaluating the meeting or activity after it is completed

supportive leadership
a leadership style in which the leader demonstrates concern for the well-being and personal needs of organizational members

symbolic convergence
a theory developed by Bormann that our sense of group identity or group consciousness is developed over time through what he called 'fantasies,' or non-task related communication like inside jokes or stories

symposium
a presentation format that involves a series of short speeches, usually informative, on various aspects of the same general topic

synergy
the potential for gains in performance or heightened quality of interactions when complementary members or member characteristics are added to existing ones

systems of privilege and oppression
discriminate and advantage based on perceived or real differences among people

task cohesion
the commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group

task roles
group roles that contribute directly to the group's completion of a task or achievement of its goal or purpose. Task-related roles typically serve leadership, informational, or procedural functions

task-oriented groups
groups formed to solve a problem, promote a cause, or generate ideas or information

task-related functions
leadership behaviors that contribute to providing, seeking, and evaluating information

teams
task-oriented groups in which members are especially loyal and dedicated to the task and other group members

teamwork
the process by which members of the team combine their knowledge, skills, abilities, and other resources through a coordinated series of actions to produce an outcome

technical knowledge
skills and information needed to complete a task

trait approach
an approach to studying leadership that distinguishes leaders from followers based on traits, or personal characteristics

transactional leadership
an approach to leadership that focuses on the leader and follower relationship in which the leader exchanges rewards and punishment for the follower's performance

transformational leadership
an approach to leadership that emphasizes the relationship between the leader and follower, with a focus on inspiring change in both the leader and the followers

Tuckman's model of group development
a descriptive model of group development developed by Tuckman that proposes groups move through five stages —forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning

unanimity
a situation in which no one explicitly stated objections to a proposal or decision by the group. This is distinct from consensus where everyone explicitly supports the decision

uncertainty accepting cultures
: cultures with a high tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk-taking. The unknown is more openly accepted, and rules and regulations tend to be more lax

uncertainty-rejecting cultures
: cultures with a low tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk-taking. The unknown is minimized through strict rules and regulations

unproductive roles
: group roles that prevent or make it more difficult for the group to make progress. Examples of these roles include the blocker, withdrawer, aggressor, and doormat

virtual teams
: groups that take advantage of new technologies and meet exclusively or primarily online to achieve their purpose or goal

voice quality
: the emotional tone of your voice, from happy and enthusiastic to serious or even sad

volume
: the loudness of your voice

wikis
: collaborations on Web content that are created and edited by users

work group norm
: a standard that is shared by group members and regulates member behavior within a group or organization