



CHAPTER NINETEEN

WORKING WITH GROUPS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Matt Minahan

The history of human endeavor is full of huge accomplishments that far exceed the capacity of any one person or group. They are often our most complex and demanding tasks, requiring interdependence among people and groups, leadership, communications, constructive norms, differentiated functions and roles, and, perhaps most importantly, the ability to understand and mobilize human behavior toward a common goal.

Sometimes the tasks seem beyond our reach—putting a man on the moon within a decade, mapping the human genome, building the International Space Station, or the intergovernmental responses to national disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis and hurricanes. Sometimes, they are much more mundane, such as determining the performance measures for a task team. No matter the size, the efforts, ideas, interests, and egos of multiple people must be organized and aligned to produce a result that is greater than the sum of its parts. In fact, groups are simultaneously one of the most prolific, yet profoundly puzzling elements of human and organizational life, which explains the push/pull, love/hate, approach/avoid reaction that people have about them.

One of the major challenges of being and working in groups is understanding the variety and complexity of the dynamics. There are complex issues happening within each person in the group; there are complex and many times unspoken dynamics among pairs of people in the group; there

are complex and difficult-to-observe phenomena occurring at the group level; and there is interaction between the group and its environment, all of which can profoundly affect everything else. It is vital for effective group members, facilitators, and OD consultants to be able to observe the different levels of interaction, apply their observations to a theory or model in use, and then intervene appropriately.

This chapter will outline some of the foundational thinking and knowledge about groups and teams, offer an integrated group development theory and model, identify some key differences between groups and teams, collect some of the key factors that affect group performance into an integrated group dynamics model, summarize some strategies for better intervening in groups and teams, and then suggest some competencies for doing the job well.

Foundational Thinkers and Thoughts

The earliest research on people and groups was conducted in the 1890s, when psychologist Norman Triplett was studying the results of bicycle races, and discovered that cyclists' times were faster when they were racing against each other than when racing against the clock (Triplett, 1898). In his own laboratory, he found that children performed better on tasks when paired than when alone. Was it the presence of other people that stimulated better performance? Were there impacts other than just faster times that resulted from having other people present? These were the first questions in our thirst for knowledge about our behavior in groups. Through the early 20th century, researchers concluded that the presence of other people enhanced performance on simple tasks, but impeded performance on more complex tasks.

Lewin

The first reference to “group dynamics” dates from 1939, when social scientist Kurt Lewin described the group as its own entity, different from, and more than just the aggregate of its individual members, having its own “life” and underlying dynamics.

As a young Jewish man in Nazi Germany, Lewin developed an acute interest in the relationship between the individual and society, and brought to his work a deep abiding and lived awareness of the power of the majority to isolate and victimize the minority. OD's commitment to democracy, social justice, empowerment of the marginalized, and the elimination of

racism and oppression, imperatives that still influence the practice of OD to this day, can be traced back to Lewin, Dorothy Day, and Paulo Friere, among others.

Lewin died prematurely of heart disease in 1947, but his research colleagues, Ken Benne, Leland Bradford, and Ron Lippitt went on to found NTL Institute, with carries on the T-group tradition at sites around the world, with a commitment to feedback and personal growth through laboratory education. Much of what we know and most of what we practice around experiential learning and education comes from these early practitioners. To this day, healthy groups are able to observe their own interactions, reflect on their meanings, and make changes to improve, in much the same way that was discovered by Lewin and his colleagues.

Bion

Meanwhile, in England, British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion developed a structure for understanding group dynamics. Bion's theory is based in large part on his work managing a rehabilitation unit for psychiatric patients in the British Army during World War II and later with small groups at the Tavistock Clinic. The central concept in Bion's theory is that in every group, two groups exist: the "work group" and the "basic assumption group". It should be made clear that Bion was not referring to factions or subgroups within the group, but rather to two dimensions of behavior that exist simultaneously within the group. The *work group* is that element of group functioning that is concerned with the primary task or work of the group. The mature work group is aware of its purpose and can define its task. Its members work cooperatively and belong to the group because they identify with interests of the group. This group tests its conclusions, seeks knowledge, and learns from its experience.

Bion's *basic assumption group* employs ineffective and self-contradicting behaviors that reduce the effectiveness of the group. The basic assumption group can be thought of as the "as if" group, meaning that the group behaves "as if" certain tacit assumptions were held by the members. These assumptions are hidden in the group subconscious, outside the awareness of group members. Bion identified three types of basic assumption groups: the *dependency*, the *fight-flight*, and the *pairing* groups. These are shown in Table 19.1.

Bion's work led to the establishment of The Tavistock Institute in London, which continues to conduct research, consulting, and professional development work globally to support change and learning.

TABLE 19.1. BION'S BASIC ASSUMPTION GROUPS AND BEHAVIORS

Dependency	Fight-Flight	Pairing
Members passively look to trainer/leader for all answers	Group demonstrates paranoid tendencies	Group relies on two individuals for all creative effort
Members provide partial or inadequate information	Group refuses to examine itself critically	Group members express hopeful anticipation using clichés such as “Things will get better when . . .”
Group insists on simplistic solutions to problems	Group creates an “enemy,” real or imagined	Group members are attentive and interested in the creative process
Group eventually demonstrates hostility and disappointment toward trainer/leader	Individual members may be sacrificed or scapegoated for the “good” of the group	Solutions or leaders generated by pairing are sabotaged and destroyed by the group
Group searches for alternative leaders when original one fails	Weaknesses (as perceived by the group) are not tolerated	

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Schutz's FIRO-B

Following World War II, advances in technology and the shift from manual labor to intellectual work created challenges for the Combat Information Centers, the nerve centers on large ships. Some were very effective, and some were dysfunctional. A curious Will Schutz, already a doctoral researcher and university lecturer, during his own tour as a seaman studied the characteristics of the men in these centers, looking for compatibility measures around which these Centers could be staffed (Schutz, 1994). In 1958, he published the Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship theory, and its subsequent instrument, FIRO-B, for behavior. The model explains interpersonal behavior in terms of the individual's orientation toward others with regard to three interpersonal needs; *inclusion (I)*, *control (C)*, and *affection (A)*, and the individual's need to either *express (e)* or demonstrate that behavior to others, or *want (w)* or desire to receive that behavior as expressed by others (Sweeney, 1993.)

Schutz also held that groups progress through three phases of life, dealing first with questions around:

- Inclusion, or who is in (involved and committed to the task) and who is out (less involved and less committed to the task). Once the group has dealt with its inclusion needs, then it can deal with. . . .

- Control, or who is up (influential, powerful, having an impact, leading) and who is down (less influence or power, less impact, not leading). Once the group has dealt with its control needs, then it can deal with. . . .
- Affection, or who is close (relational, committed to others) and who is far (isolated, not involved or committed to others).

The FIRO-B remains one of the most validated, best documented instruments for working with group and teams, and knowing the model can help understand the underlying interpersonal needs that are being met as groups and teams go about their business.

Bennis and Shepard's Theory of Group Development

During the same years, and based on their work with T-groups, Warren Bennis and Herb Shepard incorporated concepts from Bion, Will Schutz, and others into their theory that outlines two major areas of internal uncertainty that groups must deal with: *dependence* (authority relations) and *interdependence* (personal relations).

The first major area, or Phase 1, is dependence, which refers to members' feelings or anxieties related to the leader or structure or rules for the group. Members who are "dependent" are comforted by authority structures such as procedures, rules, agendas and experts, whereas members who resist such structures are considered "counter-dependent." Members who are unconflicted with regard to leadership and power are considered "independent" and are responsible for the major movements of the group from one sub-phase to the next. The three sub-phases of dependence are flight, fight, and catharsis.

It is only after the group has resolved its issues around authority, leadership, and structure that it can turn its attention to relationships among each other and shared responsibility. Phase 2, Interdependence, refers to the members' need for interpersonal intimacy. Members who cannot feel comfortable until a high level of intimacy has been established within the group are termed "over-personal," whereas members who avoid or withdraw from interpersonal intimacy are termed "counterpersonal." Those who are not conflicted in this area are called "personals." The three sub-phases of interdependence are enchantment (another facet of flight), disenchantment (another facet of fight), and consensual validation. Table 19.2 shows the theory.

Finally, one of the easiest models to apply because it is memorable is Bruce Tuckman's five-stage model (1965) of Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning, well documented in textbooks and on the web.

TABLE 19.2. BENNIS AND SHEPARD'S THEORY OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Phase 1: Dependence (Authority Relations)	Phase 2: Interdependence (Personal Relations)
<p><i>Sub-Phase 1: Dependence—Flight</i></p> <p>Members search fruitlessly for a common goal</p> <p>Members share harmless facts and information about selves, doodle, yawn, or intellectualize</p> <p>Group discusses interpersonal problems as if they are external to the group</p> <p>Members look to trainer/leader for approval and direction</p>	<p><i>Sub-Phase 4: Enchantment—Flight</i></p> <p>Members are happy, cohesive, and relaxed</p> <p>Coffee and cake may be served at meetings</p> <p>Group plans events such as group parties and outings</p> <p>Group may create poems or songs to commemorate important persons or events in the group</p> <p>Disagreements and issues are misinterpreted or ignored</p>
<p><i>Sub-Phase 2: Counter-Dependence—Fight</i></p> <p>Group splits into two opposing subgroups</p> <p>Attempts to impose structure by electing a chairman, creating agendas, forming committees, etc., are thwarted</p> <p>Members frequently vote or suggest that group is too large and should split up</p> <p>Members openly question trainer/leader's competence</p> <p>Members openly express hostility and dissatisfaction</p>	<p><i>Sub-Phase 5: Disenchantment—Fight</i></p> <p>Group splits into two opposing subgroups</p> <p>Members go out of their way to join in a conversation with a subgroup rather than speak to the whole group</p> <p>Counter-personals make disparaging remarks about the group, or demonstrate absenteeism or boredom</p> <p>Over-personals insist they are happy and may speak in religious terms about "Christian love," consideration for others, etc.</p>
<p><i>Sub-Phase 3: Resolution—Catharsis</i></p> <p>Group suggests trainer/leader leave group "as an experiment"</p> <p>Alertness and attention is heightened</p> <p>Group discusses member roles and responsibilities</p> <p>Group refers to removal of trainer as "the time we became a group" or "a turning point"</p>	<p><i>Sub-Phase 6: Consensual Validation</i></p> <p>External pressures and group-shared goals force group to examine itself</p> <p>Unconflicted members provide a breakthrough by making a self-assessment, requesting an assessment of their own roles, or expressing confidence in the group's ability</p> <p>Members enter into meaningful discussion and problem solving</p> <p>Members demonstrate awareness of their own involvement and of the group's processes</p>

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TABLE 19.3. ANTHONY BANET'S THEORY OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT BASED ON THE I CHING

Dependency	Fight-Flight	Pairing
Members passively look to trainer/leader for all answers	Group demonstrates paranoid tendencies	Group relies on two individuals for all creative effort
Members provide partial or inadequate information	Group refuses to examine itself critically	Group members express hopeful anticipation using clichés such as “Things will get better when”
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An Eastern Perspective: Anthony Banet, Jr.

The first attempt to integrate what had been mostly Anglo and western research with eastern philosophies was Anthony Banet, Jr.,’s “A Theory of Group Development Based on the I Ching” in 1976. The concept of continuous change and dynamic phenomena goes back at least to 500 B.C. when philosophers Heraclitus in Greece and Confucius in China separately compared the constant movement of experience to the ever-changing flow of a river. Where western science tends to look for cause-effect and freeze-unfreeze-refreeze dynamics, eastern philosophies acknowledge the continuous flow of experience in all things, called the Tao. “The energies of individual members and of the group are distributed, flowing between yin (passive, receptive, simple, docile) and yang (active, creative, exciting, firm.) (Banet, 1976, pp 259–260.)

What Schutz and Bennis and Shepard describe as stages or phases or group development, Banet describes as “movements,” or the changing arrangement of yin and yang forces. See Table 19.3.

Toward an Integrated Theory and Model

Almost all of the foundational concepts in group development and OD, especially from the 1940s through the 1970s, are based on research in

psychology and sociology—many using T-groups and group therapy settings—where the focus is on the relationship between the individual and the group. In the 1950s through the 1990s, research in the field of management and organizations was established in its own right, providing more of an organizational orientation to our knowledge, and expanding the applicability of the foundation concepts to more every-day settings such as businesses and organizations.

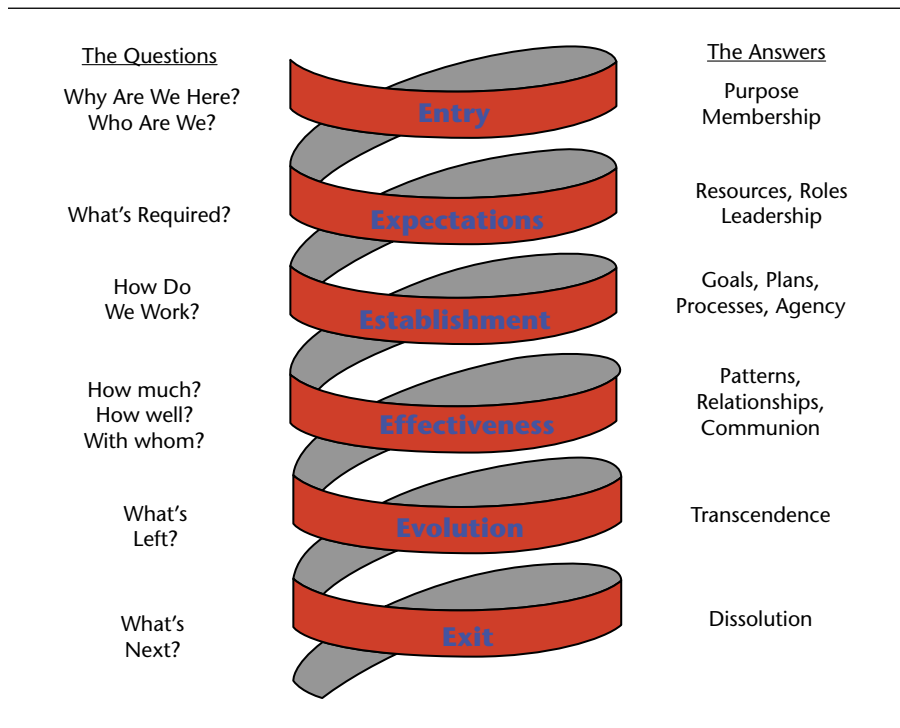
Beginning in the mid-1990s, new concepts from the physical and biological sciences began to infuse group development thinking and research with new concepts. Scientists such as mathematician Arthur M. Young's Theory of Process, physicist David Bohm's dialogue practice, Chilean Humberto Maturano's biological and cybernetics view (Maturano & Poerksen, 2004) are just a few. New science thinkers have also contributed to more current group development models, including physicists such as Gregory Bateson (2002), Ilya Prigogine (1997, 1990), and Fritjof Capra (2002). Philosopher Ken Wilber has integrated Eastern and Western thinking (2001a, b), and science writer David Berreby (2005, 2008) brings the physical science of the brain and neuroscience to our group and tribal minds, all of which need to inform our models and perspectives.

The "Group Spiral" shown in Figure 19.1 integrates some of the key concepts of early group research with the emerging principles of complex systems, and presents a useful tool for practitioners. The stages that are represented in the spiral appear more discreet and finite than they actually are; it's important to remember that groups work in non-linear ways, that these stages are arbitrary markers in the life of a group, and that there is no clear boundary between the end of one stage, and the beginning of another.

The spiral connotes the circularity of group life, and is also bi-directional, allowing movement both toward and away from depth and intimacy (Scheidel & Crowell, 1964). The spiral also has infinite elasticity, rather like the children's toy, the Slinky (Fisher, 1974.)

Entry The overall concerns of entry center around the purpose of the group, and its membership. Every human's relationship with every system begins with a point of entry. The new entrant is preoccupied with questions about the purpose of the group and its alignment with her or his own goals and needs, whether or not to join the system, on what terms to join, and how fully to invest emotionally in the system and its members.

FIGURE 19.1. THE GROUP SPIRAL



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Expectations Expectations around leadership and roles are the concerns of this phase. With a resolution to the questions of entry, the new member then wrestles with questions about what is required of the members of the group: How does leadership in this group occur? What will be required of me? Am I competent to deliver? and How fully am I able or willing to commit?

Establishment The period of establishment is concerned with the plans, methods, processes, and the wholeness, or the agency, of the group. The individual's questions center around being established as a member in full standing, what can be contributed that would add value, and who can be trusted. As with other factors in the Spiral, these questions may well be revisited later in the life of the group, but the individual must make an early first judgment about them now. Meanwhile, the group establishes

goals for the future, plans for achieving the goals, measures of progress, and processes or methods that enable it to reach its purpose.

Effectiveness Patterns and relationships internally, and relationships with other similar entities—or communion—are the concerns of the effectiveness stage. The individual is preoccupied with questions such as: Am I being efficient? Effective? With whom? Why? Groups in this phase are developing patterns that reduce uncertainty and anxiety, and which appear, at least on the surface, to improve performance.

Evolution The concerns of this phase are around implementation of the group's work and transcending its form. This is a pivot point for the group, offering choices about how to end, or, in what form to continue. The individual is calculating the return on the effort investment, asking questions like: What have I given? Gained? Has it been worth the effort? In what ways did my contribution add value?

Exit Confronting dissolution is the central concern of the exit phase on the spiral. The individual is trapped among competing questions. On the one hand, there is a sense of loss that the task is over, the goal has been met, the group is done, the form has expired, and relationships must come to an end. Simultaneously, however, the individual is also likely to have a sense of relief that the job has been done and the pressure is now off, and likely anticipation of the application of the group's work, and the new forms that key relationships might take. See Table 19.4 for some elaboration of the spiral.

Groups and Teams

One specific and unique kind of group is the team, an important organizational form for working across structures, functions, time, and space. While there are many similarities between groups and teams, there are some important differences, shown in Table 19.5.

One of the best and most widely used models for developing and building teams is the Team Performance Model (Figure 19.2), developed by Alan Drexler and David Sibbet (Minahan, 2005).

The team performance model is built around Arthur M. Young's Theory of Process, with time across the X axis, and constraint along the Y axis. But rather than the Y scale climbing from low constraint to high constraint, in Young's model and the Team Performance Model, constraint

TABLE 19.4. THE GROUP SPIRAL

Phase	Concerns	Individual's Task	Group's Task	Facilitation Task
Entry	Purpose Membership	Explore own fit with purpose, other members	Establish purpose, membership	Assure all are welcome, introduced and clear about the purpose
Expectations	Roles Leadership	Determine what's expected of me, and how I relate to the leadership	Establish obligations of members, formal and informal group leadership	Assure roles and responsibilities are clear to all
Establishment	Goals Plans Measures Processes Agency	Establish own identity, position self as a contributor, tentatively build alliances	Establish plans, goals, measures, methods, and processes for production	Help articulate and reinforce group's identity. Guide consideration of communication and decision making
Effectiveness	Patterns Relationships Communion	Contribute efficiently and effectively. Observe and comment on group process. Look for ways to improve. Deepen relationships	Establish and maintain norms and patterns. Negotiate relationships and interdependencies with other entities	Examine routines, habits and patterns Confront unspoken assumptions and unwritten rules Encourage dissent
Evolution	Transcendence	Growth Develop new skills and insights	Escape previous limitations, reach for higher forms.	Assure reflection occurs, integrate lessons learned
Exit	Dissolution	Integrate lessons learned Detach from this form. Invent new ways to maintain key relationships	Assess contribution, celebrate success	Assure acknowledgement and celebration

is measured at its highest at the bottom of the Y axis, and at its lowest at the top of the Y axis. So at the top of the model are the earliest stages, Orientation and Trust Building, and the latest stages, High Performance and Renewal, which are the least constrained. The middle stages of Goal Clarification, Commitment, and Implementation are placed at the bottom of the model because they are the times of most constraint.

TABLE 19.5. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS AND TEAMS

Criteria	Groups	Teams
What is the purpose?	Support and develop the principles, skills, and abilities of members in a chosen domain	Accomplish a project plan that supports organization objectives
Who belongs?	Members from one or many organizations or not affiliated with any organization	Members of the organization
What makes members come together?	Self-selection based on expertise or passion	Selected and assigned by management
What is the glue holding it together?	The passion, commitment, and identification to the chosen cause or knowledge domain	The organization plan or the project charter
What about goals?	Goals are often self-generated and work best if aligned with members' interests and needs	Goals are derived from the purpose, chartered by the organization
What is the nature of the activities?	Projects that are optional, voluntary, mainly intrinsically rewarding	Tasks aligned with organizational interests, with established deliverables and deadlines, with both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards possible
How long does it last?	As long as the members have interest in building the practice and sustaining the community	Until the project or work is completed
What are the resources?	Information, knowledge, experience, member commitment, and collaboration, etc.	The same, plus organizational support, including technology, budget, etc.

Adapted from: federalconnections.org, Communities of Practice: Connecting Know-How Across Government

Note the pivot that occurs in the commitment stage. The downward movement ends, the team commits to a shared vision, resources are allocated, and the team is ready for implementation.

Healthy, well-managed teams move through these stages in a mostly sequential manner. However, as the model indicates, when key questions are left unaddressed, the group can regress. The addition or loss of members, or changes in the environment or task or can send a group back to earlier stages.

Even though they all appear to be the same size, some of these stages can occur quite quickly, and others can last quite long. A well-designed team launch workshop can help a group manage its way through orientation, trust building, goal clarification, and commitment in a fairly short period of time, allowing the team to spend most of its life in implementation and high performance.

Toward an Integrated Group Dynamics Model

In addition to the stages of a group or team's life, there are other variables or group dynamics that determine success or failure.

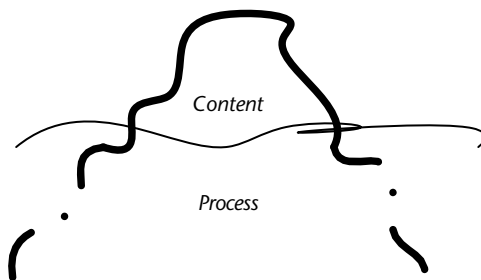
Understanding Content and Process

In working with groups, it's important to distinguish between the content or the *what* of the group's work, versus the process or the *how* of the group's work. Leaving aside, for the moment, the T-group, in which the content of the group's work is to learn about process . . . every group that's successful and sustains itself has a purpose to which members commit and most have a task to accomplish.

The iceberg is good metaphor for these two variables (see Figure 19.3).

Above the water line is what is visible to all, and it is what we are trained to do and see. The content of a group's work is typically organized around tasks, events, products, meetings, and conversations of the group. When

**FIGURE 19.3. CONTENT AND PROCESS OF GROUP WORK:
THE ICEBERG**



we look for how the task is being accomplished, we look for clear goals, adequate knowledge and other resources, progress toward goals, and effective performance measures as typical variables affecting the content of the group's work (Schein, 1982).

Harder to see is what is below the water line, the process variables, which we typically are not trained to see. When we look at the process variables, or the *how* of the group's work, we look for if/how the group plans its work, creates ideas, evaluates options, makes decisions, listens and communicates, engages all of its members, capitalizes on its diversity, and creates and maintains patterns, habits, unwritten rules and norms. We look for evidence of the unconscious or subconscious dynamics of the group, how members join and leave the group, how leadership occurs, who participates and how much, and a host of other variables.

Most times, members of groups have expertise at the task, or the content or substance of the work; many times, group facilitators are retained for their knowledge about the process variables, or the how of the group's work. Knowing the difference, and being able to observe them separately is a key skill need in working with groups.

Purpose

One of the most powerful ways to organize a group and make it productive is to orient members around an overall purpose and clear set of goals. Individuals will always have their own reasons for joining or participating in any group, but when there is congruence and alignment among the individuals' goals and the group's goals, the likelihood of high performance and satisfaction with the outcome increases dramatically. Strategic planning, goal setting, and goal clarification exercises provide clarity and alignment around the purpose and desired outcomes for the group, which increases the effectiveness and efficiency the group's process.

Leadership

The foundations of our leadership concepts were created in the 1950s and 1960s. Douglas McGregor (1960) described two different sets of leader beliefs about employees, and the two different leadership styles that result. Theory X managers believe that people are reluctant to work, avoid responsibility, are self-interested, and would do nothing without managerial oversight. The Theory X leader directs, organizes, controls, and coerces. Theory Y managers believe that once our basic needs for survival are met,

people will exercise self-direction and self-control, and can be creative and imaginative work. The Theory Y leader creates challenges and opportunities, which encourage employees to grow (Sorensen & Minahan, 2011).

The Ohio State Leadership Studies (Yukl, 1989) synthesized eighteen hundred examples of leadership behaviors into two dimensions: *consideration*, which is the degree to which a leader acts in a friendly and supportive manner, looking out for subordinates' welfare, and *initiating structure*, which is the degree to which a leader defines and structures the work and roles of subordinates to accomplish the group's goals. Charismatic, transformative, and emotionally intelligent leadership extend these concepts much further (Yukl, 2012). See Figure 19.4.

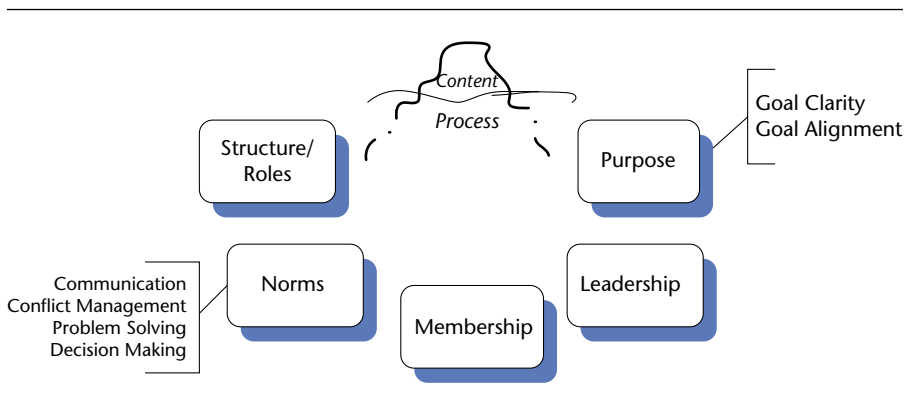
Membership

Another key factor affecting the success, or not, of a group is the membership. Are there enough people? Too many? Are they the right people? Do they have the skills needed for this task? Do they know enough about the organization and its work? Do they represent diverse perspectives, and demographics?

Norms

Norms are the unspoken rules and standards that groups adopt to define acceptable and non-acceptable behavior (Napier & Gershenfeld, 1999, p. 106).

FIGURE 19.4. GROUP DYNAMICS



Early in group life, norms are often imported from the larger context in which the group is operating. As the group matures, however, the group begins to base its actions on meanings that have developed within the group, and that is the point at which a norm has formed. The norm would be fully operative when there are sanctions on behaviors that violate the group's norms.

Norms can be extremely powerful at limiting members' behavior, which can be both constructive and destructive, depending on the norm and the situation. For example, a productive norm that contributes to the group's success might be that all deadlines are met on time. A destructive norm might be that members complain privately about group issues but don't raise them within the group or directly with the leader.

Because they are unwritten and unspoken, it is often difficult for group members to be aware of the norms' existence. One of the most powerful assets that an OD consultant or group facilitator brings to the work is the distance and perspective to see routines and patterns in action in the group that seem puzzling or curious or counterproductive, and the ability to offer those observations to the group.

There are four particular norms, or patterns or habits that groups create, mostly subconsciously, that affect their work significantly:

Communications The dynamics of group communication greatly increase the complexity and potential mishaps that can occur when communication goes awry, with mistakes, misstatements, and misunderstanding happening frequently. Because there is so much of it, it easily becomes patterned, or routinized, or habituated, which makes it even more difficult to see and to change. Some guidelines for good communication include: assume good intentions on the part of the other; listen with your head and your heart; verify your understanding of the speaker's message before responding; own your own perceptions, feelings, and messages; acknowledge that perceptions are facts (whether or not you believe that are accurate); and grant each other grace.

Conflict Management None of us likes it, and none of us can avoid it if we live in today's world of interaction and interdependence. Early models of conflict resolution were rooted in marriage and family systems work, encouraging parties first, to *differentiate*, or describe all of the factors on which there is disagreement, and then to *integrate*, which to focus on factors that all could agree on. This methodology is based on the belief that the simple act of listening to each other as the parties describe the different sides of the dispute will further understanding and empathy, both of

which are prerequisites for resolving conflicts. In the mid-1960s, the field developed a specialization called “intergroup conflict,” which specialized in union/management conflict and quickly spread to conflict among race and gender groups. Today there are thousands of professional dispute resolution specialists whose job it is to resolve conflicts before they enter formal adjudication processes. Some are attached to the courts system, some work in law practices, some work in ombudsman functions within organizations. According to *U.S. News & World Report*, dispute resolution will be one of the three fastest-growing professions in the 21st century.

But conflict is not all bad and need not be avoided as studiously in groups as it might be in the legal system. There is often heightened energy in a group when there is conflict, which can be powerfully and constructively channeled for the growth of the group. The good news is that group conflict can be indicative of high interest and commitment of group members to the topic, and, when managed constructively, can offer insights into the communication, leadership, and decision-making patterns that either support the group process or don't. Conflict is also a good indicator about what's *really* important to group members, which is valuable information for a group facilitator.

Problem Solving There are several parts to problem solving that have a significant impact on the final outcome. How a group defines and bounds a problem determines the range of possible solutions. How a group generates new ideas and possible alternatives, either via brainstorming, or discussion, or nominal group technique, or other means determines how broadly and creatively the alternatives are. Most groups create or inherit norms that govern these choices tacitly, but having a specific, explicit strategy for approaching these tasks helps to make sure that the group is choosing the right tools and processes to do its job in a way that fits the task.

Decision Making This is another norm that the group often inherits from its environment and from existing organizational habits and patterns. However, it is also dependent on two other variables in this model, the leadership and the membership, and the interplay between the two. In the continuum between the leader alone decides and the group as a whole decides are multiple variations (Weaver & Farrell, 1999).

Structure and Roles

Another major factor affecting the group and its performance is the structure of the group and if/how roles are differentiated. Subgroups,

sometimes even working in parallel, can help a group accomplish more. Roles such as note taker, convener, discussion leader, process observer, timekeeper, facilitator can help a group make the best use of its resources.

Intervening in Groups

In the iceberg model in Figure 19.3, an expert management consultant typically intervenes on the content of the work; he or she makes recommendations about how to solve problems related to business variables, such as finance, marketing, investment, production, supply chain, employee turnover, etc.

When an OD consultant intervenes, it is on the variables that fall below the waterline of the iceberg, those process variables that affect the group and how it does its work. In the role of process observer, the consultant notes those behaviors that seem to be supporting the work of the group and those behaviors that don't, and then shares those observations with the group as whole. Those observations could center around any of the variables on the iceberg and can focus on what is happening at the individual or the group levels.

The complexities of group and organizational life make it difficult to know exactly how and where to intervene to assure success; as the model suggests, there are multiple ways to work with a group, and multiple ways to intervene. The most effective group interventions are the ones that accurately assess the group and intervene narrowly and purposefully at the various levels within the system. Knowing whether an issue is related to leadership, or communications, or group norms, or conflict, or is related to the current phase or stage of group life takes knowledge, skill, practice, and, to a certain extent, good instincts.

Competencies Needed

To be an effective member, leader, or facilitator of a group or team, it helps to have these perspectives and skills:

- Whole system perspective, with which to be able to observe action and interaction at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and systemic levels;
- Knowledge and understanding about the life cycle—or spiral—of group life, including the dynamics that exist in specific stages and how to respond;

- Capability to work with groups from multiple perspectives, seeing the psychological factors, the interpersonal relationships, the leadership dynamics, and the systemic patterns; and
- Knowledge and understanding about yourself and your own reactions in group settings, in order to calibrate your experiences, be mindful of your impact on the group, and manage your own reactions and interventions, both for your sake and the sake of the group.

As interveners, we serve our groups and ourselves best when we remain constant students of group life and ourselves. The best group leaders and facilitators are always looking to add to their knowledge and theory bases about groups, the structure of group work and group life, and the best and most effective ways to shape a group's growth and development through interventions.

In the end, there are two major factors that determine our success as an intervener in group life. The first is our ability to notice and understand what's going on at the various levels, stages, and phases of group life; the theories and models are intended to support that work. The second is our ability to notice and understand what's going on in our own inner lives; our work as an intervener, leader, or member of a group is a function of our own self-awareness and ability to communicate about the complex factors and multiple motivations that make us human.

It's hard to imagine a future in which we are in less contact, have less interaction, and less interdependence that we have now. As organizations and society become more complex, both will demand that we spend more time with more people, doing more complex and demanding work, sometimes in groups, sometimes in teams. That will only increase the premium put on our ability to work effectively in groups and teams. To be effective as members, leaders, and facilitators, we need to have a few key tools and concepts at the ready, curiosity about group phenomena, and the willingness to reach beyond our comfort zones into where the real learning occurs.

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