

Understanding group dynamics to improve teamwork

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Goals for successful team



Full participation

Mutual understanding




Inclusive solutions

Shared responsibility





Diversity asks: *Who is in the room?*




Equity responds: *Who is trying to get in the room but can't and whose presence in the room is under constant threat of erasure?*



Inclusion asks: *Has everyone's idea been heard?*

Justice responds: *Whose ideas won't be taken seriously because they aren't in the majority?*



Workshop objectives

- Upon completion of this experiential workshop, participants will be able to:
 - Understand basics of group dynamics and group development in any group setting
 - Describe how to influence group dynamics and processes to improve teamwork and encourage full participation of all team members.
 - Explain how to ensure all team members feel included and heard



Your experiences



Think about your experiences in work groups both as a member and a leader:



- When have you felt marginalized in a group experience?
- When have you felt fully heard in a group experience?






- What makes a group “safe” and supportive of full participation and inclusion?



Group Dynamics






How groups work best

- Groups work best when members become interdependent
 - Independence= relying on one's own feelings, impressions and judgments as guide to action
 - Dependence = relying on others as a guide
 - Interdependence = learning to accept dependence (influence from others) when it is needed or is more likely to achieve the group's goals
 - Interdependence develops as a group works out new procedures, standards and values appropriate to the goals and resources (e.g. skills, capacities, abilities) of the group
 - Groups achieve interdependence through:
 - Resolution/negotiation of differences
 - Optimization of cooperation and collaboration
 - Suspension of judgment
 - Maintenance of independent thought
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Group dynamics

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- **Group dynamics** - term coined by Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist
 - Lewin observed that people who **work** in **groups** usually adopt certain behaviors and roles. **Group dynamics** refers to the impact those behaviors and roles have on other **group** members, as well as the **group** as a whole
 - The principles of small group dynamics are applicable to groups with a size of 3 to 12 people
 - Ideal group size is 6 to 8 people



Group Dynamics



- Group dynamics include:
 - Group norms
 - Interaction patterns
 - Roles
 - Stages of group development





Group Norms



- Definition- "shared expectations and beliefs about appropriate ways to act in a social situation"
 - “ground rules that define what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in a group”.



- Norms develop gradually, the process may be “invisible” to the members and leader. They are created as the group members influence each other.



- Functions of norms
 - Express group's values which help to give members a sense of who they are as a group.
 - Establish common ground thereby making groups more orderly and predictable and coordinating the group's activities.
 - Define appropriate behavior --helping members to avoid embarrassing or difficult situations
 - Creates a distinct identity for the group—differentiates them from others



Leader's role



Leader works to establish positive norms explicitly and implicitly.

It is preferable that the norms develop over time through the give and take of the group, rather than being **imposed as rules** by the leader.






Leader is constantly shaping norms and must be aware of this function

“Norms are established early on in the life of a group and once established are difficult to change” - Yalom, 2005





Leader shapes norms

- Leader needs to encourage:
 - Honesty and spontaneity of expression
 - Active involvement by all members
 - Nonjudgmental acceptance of others
 - This is achieved by:
 - Responding positively and showing interest
 - Explicitly exhorting, direct instruction
 - Expressing appreciation for members who interact
 - Challenging members who undermine adaptive norms
 - Modeling these desirable behaviors
 - Avoiding being the “hub of the wheel”
 - Asking members for reactions (to another member, to group as a whole)
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Leader is always attending to both **process and content**



- Leader monitors:

- Boundaries regarding time, space, membership
- Levels of involvement: Who is active? Who is silent?
- Types of involvement: Supportive? Challenging? (important to monitor tone as well as words themselves)
- Roles of involvement: Socio-emotional leader, task leader, monopolizer, helper, challenger
- Communication patterns: Who speaks to whom? How do decisions get made? Who is influential?
- Tone of group and anxiety level
- Productivity- Is group engaging or avoiding its tasks?
- Group development stages





Helpful leader interventions



- Empathizing and validating, convey understanding
- Seeking concreteness
- Focusing- keeping group on track






- Clarifying and questioning
- Scanning for non verbal cues
- Identifying themes and summarizing– both what individual members say as well as summarizing group themes and processes





Helpful leader interventions

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- Linking- make connections between similarities in feelings or experiences that exist among members
 - Reaching for difference- support member's differences while maintaining unity
 - Encouraging participation and supporting
 - Amplifying and Softening- can be very helpful in equalizing status among members
 - Cutting off discussion when necessary, interrupting attacking comments and discouraging excessive member disclosures
 - Shifting focus- from one person to another or one topic to another, or from discussion to activity



Lost at Sea



Questions and Discussion



Supplemental Materials

Groupthink

- Concept developed by Irving Janis in 1982
- His definition- “ a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive ingroup, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of actions.”
- Alternate definition- Occurs when “group member's desire to maintain good relations becomes more important than reaching a good decision”

Causes of groupthink

- Cohesiveness- limits dissent –disagreements help to make good decisions
- Dissenters may be isolated or even scapegoated
- Isolation- limited input from outside sources
- Domineering and/or charismatic leadership
- Decisional stress - such as time pressure and/or the magnitude of the decision
- Belief in morality of the group
- Stereotypes of outgroups- enhances sense of righteousness
- Self censorship- people hide their misgivings
- Illusion of invulnerability leads members to engage in risk taking
- Self appointed “mind guards”- act as censors who keep opposing viewpoints out of the group

Remedies for Groupthink

- The leader should assign the role of critical evaluator to each member
- The leader should avoid stating preferences and expectations at the outset
- Each member of the group should routinely discuss the groups' deliberations with a trusted associate and report back to the group on the associate's reactions
- One or more experts should be invited to each meeting on a staggered basis. The outside experts should be encouraged to challenge views of the members.
- At least one articulate and knowledgeable member should be given the role of devil's advocate (to question assumptions and plans)