

**LECTURE 11: COMMUNICATION IN GROUPS, TEAMS, AND ORGANIZATIONS**

## Learning Outcomes



After studying the material of this lesson you should be able to:

1. Explain the characteristics of a Group and effective leadership.
2. Understand the types of goals that operate in groups.
3. Discuss the various types of groups.
4. Analyze the advantages and disadvantages of decision making.
5. Critic the cultural influences on groups communication
6. Apply Problem Solving in Groups

**Communication Strategies for Leaders***Characteristics of Effective Leaders*

Leadership is defined in two very different ways in research and theory:

- Leadership is the process of influencing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of group members and establishing the direction that others follow; leadership and influence are parts of the same skill.
- Leadership is the process of empowering others; the leader is the person who helps others to maximize their potential and to take control of their lives.

These two definitions are not mutually exclusive; in fact, most effective leaders do both: they influence and they empower. As you read about leadership, keep these two definitions or functions of power and empowerment in mind.

In many small groups one person serves as leader; in other groups leadership may be shared by several persons. In some cases a person may be appointed the leader or may serve as leader because of her or his position within the company or hierarchy. In other cases the leader may emerge as the group proceeds in fulfilling its functions or instead may be elected by the group members. Two significant factors exert considerable influence on who emerges as group leader. One is the extent of active participation: The person who talks the most is more likely to emerge as leader. The second factor is effective listening: Members who listen effectively will emerge as leaders more often than those who do not.

**MYTHS ABOUT LEADERSHIP**

Many common beliefs about leadership are erroneous. The following are three examples of myths about leadership paraphrased from small group theorists:

- **Myth: *The skills of leadership are rare.*** Actually, all of us have the potential for leadership. There are millions of people throughout the world who are serving leadership functions in government, business, education, and countless other fields.
- **Myth: *Leaders are born.*** Actually, the major leadership skills can be learned by just about everyone. No specific genetic endowment is necessary. We all can improve our leadership abilities.

• **Myth: Leaders are all charismatic.** Actually, only some leaders are. According to one survey of leaders they were of all heights, varied in articulateness, and dressed both well and poorly.

## **APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP**

Not surprisingly, leadership has been the focus of considerable research attention. Researchers have identified several views of leadership, called approaches. Looking at a few of these approaches will give you a better idea of the varied ways in which leadership may be viewed and a better grasp of what leadership is and how it may be achieved.

### **The Traits Approach**

This approach views the leader as the one who possesses those characteristics or skills that contribute to leadership. The traits approach is valuable for stressing the characteristics that often (but not always) distinguish leaders from nonleaders. For example, some of the world's leading corporations seek technology project managers and leaders by looking for people who have technological skills, group building skills. And interpersonal skills. Research has found that the traits most frequently associated with leadership include intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. A shortcoming of the traits approach is that these qualities often vary according to the situations in which the leader functions, such as the group type, the personalities and roles of the other members, and the group's cultural context. Thus, for some groups (e.g., a new computer game company), a youthful, energetic, humorous leader might be most effective; for other groups (e.g., a medical diagnosis team), an older, more experienced and serious leader might be most effective.

### **The Functional Approach**

This approach to leadership focuses on what the leader should do in a given situation. We will encounter some of these functions in the discussion of group roles. Other functions associated with leadership are setting group goals, giving the group members direction, and summarizing the group's progress. Additional functions are identified later in this lecture.

### **The Transformational Approach**

This approach describes a "transformational" (also called visionary or charismatic) leader who elevates the group's members, enabling them not only to accomplish the group task but also to emerge as more empowered individuals. At the center of the transformational approach is the concept of charisma, that quality of an individual that makes us believe or want to follow him or her. Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy are often cited as examples of transformational leaders. These leaders were role models, were seen as extremely competent and able, and articulated moral goals. We'll return to this concept of charisma and its qualities when we examine credibility in Chapter 14.

### **The Situational Approach**

This approach holds that the effective leader shifts his or her emphasis between task accomplishment (i.e., identifying and focusing on the specific problem that the group must solve) and member satisfaction (i.e., providing for the psychological and interpersonal needs of the group members) on the basis of the specific group situation. This twofold function, you'll notice, rests on essentially the same distinction between relationship and task groups that we considered in Chapter 9. Some groups call for a high focus on task issues and need little people encouragement; this might be the case, for example, with a group of experienced scientists researching a cure for AIDS. In contrast, a group of recovering alcoholics might require leadership that stresses the members' emotional needs. The general idea of situational

leadership is that there is no one style of leadership that fits all situations; each situation will call for a different ratio of emphasis on task and on member satisfaction. Effective leadership, according to this approach, depends on the leader's assessment of the group's ability to do the task and their willingness and commitment to do it.

This theory identifies four leadership styles:

- **Telling style:** The leader provides high levels of task guidance and tells the group members what to do, when and where to do it, and how to do it. This style is most appropriate for a group that lacks knowledge of the issues involved and needs direct guidance on how to complete the task.
- **Selling style:** The leader gives the group high levels of both task guidance and relationship support. This leader not only tells people what to do but also tells them why they should do it; the leader wants to get the members' psychological support (i.e., to get them to "buy into" the task at hand).
- **Participating style:** The leader gives the group high levels of relationship support but little in the way of task direction. This leadership style is appropriate for a group that knows what to do (hence little task direction is needed) but that seems to have lost the motivation or willingness to accomplish the task.
- **Delegating style:** The leader gives little task direction and little emotional support. This leadership style is most appropriate for a group that knows what to do and how to do it and also has the confidence, commitment, and motivation to accomplish the task. The leader merely needs to delegate tasks for the group's goals to be accomplished.

### Leadership Approaches

#### GENERAL STYLES OF LEADERSHIP

In addition to the styles identified in the situational approach to leadership, small group theorists also distinguish among laissez-faire, democratic, and authoritarian leaders. As you'll see, these three styles represent a different way of looking at leadership and leadership style.

The *laissez-faire leader* takes no initiative in directing or suggesting alternative courses of action. Rather, this leader allows the group to develop and progress on its own, even allowing it to make its own mistakes. The laissez-faire leader answers questions and provides information only when specifically asked. During the interaction, this leader neither compliments nor criticizes group members or the group's progress.

The *democratic leader* provides direction but allows the group to develop and progress the way its members wish; this form of leadership is similar to the "participating style" in the situational approach. The democratic leader encourages group members to determine their own goals and procedures and aims to stimulate self-direction and self-actualization of the group members.

The *authoritarian leader* is the opposite of the laissez-faire leader. As in the "telling style" of leadership in the situational approach, this leader determines group policies and makes decisions without consulting or securing agreement from the other members of the group. The authoritarian leader discourages member-to member communication. This person is concerned with getting the group to accept his or her decisions rather than making its own.

The *servant leadership*, based on the idea that a leader's job is mostly to recruit outstanding team members and provide the support they need to do a good job. Unlike laissez-faire leaders, who tend to have a hands-off approach, servant leaders are often highly involved with team members and processes. Each of these styles is effective in some situations. As you might expect, morale tends to be higher in teams with servant leaders than in those with authoritarian leaders. However, an authoritarian approach can sometimes produce faster results. Satisfaction is typically high in teams led by democratic leaders, but inclusive decision making can be time consuming. Highly experienced teams may appreciate the hands-off approach of a laissez-faire leader, but for many teams, the ambiguity involved creates added stress. A Gallup survey of millions of American workers revealed that nearly half of them don't have a clear sense of what their bosses expect of them. Servant leadership has been shown to enhance team members' satisfaction and lead them to feel more self-confident and optimistic. Although leaders tend to have one or two main styles, they may exhibit a mix, depending on the situation.

### **VIRTUAL GROUPS AND TEAMS**

Small groups and teams use a wide variety of channels. Often, interactions take place face-to-face; this is the channel that probably comes to mind when you think of groups. But, a great deal of small group and team interaction takes place online, among geographically separated members who communicate as a group via computer or phone connections—with Skype, LinkedIn, or Facebook, for example. These virtual groups and teams serve both relationship and social purposes on the one hand (these are best thought of as small groups) and business and professional purposes on the other (these are best thought of as teams). Perhaps the best example of virtual groups serving relationship purposes are social networking sites, where friends interact in groups but may be separated by classrooms or by oceans. And, increasingly, these social networking sites are being used to perform business tasks as well—for finding jobs, conducting business, solving organizational problems, and conducting just about any kind of function that a face-to-face group would serve. Business and professional purposes often are served by virtual teams. Some of these team members may be working at home; but increasingly, virtual teams consist of people who are in different work spaces, perhaps in different parts of an office building, perhaps in different countries. The same principles of effective group communication apply to all kinds of groups and teams, whether social or business, face-to-face or virtual (we'll use the most inclusive term "small group" to refer to all types of groups). Whether you're working on a team project with colleagues in different countries, communicating with new friends on Facebook, or interacting face-to-face with your extended family, the principles discussed here will prove useful.

The lack of nonverbal cues makes it difficult to convey and understand members' emotions and attitudes. Mediated meetings may be more convenient, but groups working at a distance take more time to reach decisions than those who meet face to face. Because typing takes more time and effort than speaking, messages conveyed via computer can lack the detail of spoken ones. In some cases, members may not even bother to type out a message online that they would have shared in person. Finally, the string of separate messages that is generated in a computerized medium can be hard to track, sort out, and synthesize in a meaningful way. Research comparing the quality of decisions made by face-to-face and online groups is mixed. Some studies have found no significant differences. Others have found that computer-mediated groups generate more ideas than people meeting in person, although they take

longer to reach agreement on which are best. The growing body of research suggests that certain types of mediated communication work better than others. For example, asynchronous groups seem to make better decisions than those functioning in a “chat” mode. Groups who have special decision-support software perform better than ones operating without this advantage. Having a moderator also improves the effectiveness of on-line groups (Adler and Rodman, 2009)

### **SMALL GROUP FORMATS**

Small groups serve their functions in a variety of formats. Among the most popular small group formats for relatively formal functions are the round table, the panel, the symposium, and the symposium-forum.

- In the roundtable, group members arrange themselves physically (usually in chairs) in a circular or semicircular pattern. They share information or solve a problem without any set pattern of who speaks when. Group interaction is informal, and members contribute as they see fit. A leader or moderator may be present; he or she may, for example, try to keep the discussion on the topic or encourage more reticent members to speak up.
- In the panel, group members are "experts" but participate informally and without any set pattern of who speaks when, as in a roundtable. The difference is that they are sitting, often side-by-side, in front of an audience, whose members may interject comments or ask questions.
- In the symposium, each member delivers a prepared presentation much like a public speech. All speeches address different aspects of a single topic. A symposium leader introduces the speakers, provides transitions from one speaker to another, and may provide periodic summaries.
- The symposium-forum consists of two parts: a symposium with prepared speeches (as explained above) and a forum, a period of questions from the audience and responses by the speakers. The leader introduces the speakers and moderates the question-and-answer session.

These four formats are general patterns that describe a wide variety of groups. Within each type, there will naturally be variation. For example, in the symposium-forum, there is no set pattern for how much time will be spent on the symposium part and how much on the forum part. Combinations may also be used. Thus, for example, group members may each present a position paper (basically a symposium) and then participate in a roundtable discussion.

### **SMALL GROUP APPREHENSION**

Just as you may have apprehension about public speaking (a topic to be discussed in lecture 12) you probably experience apprehension to some degree in group discussions. Because small groups vary so widely, you're likely to experience different degrees of apprehension depending on the nature of the specific group. Work groups, for example, may cause greater apprehension than groups of friends. And interacting with superiors is likely to generate greater anxiety than meeting with peers or subordinates. Similarly, the degree of familiarity you have with the group members and the extent to which you see yourself as a part of the group (as opposed to an outsider) also will influence your level of apprehension. If you are apprehensive in group situations (the self-test included here will help you determine this), you may want to review the suggestions for reducing your apprehension in public speaking; they are the same skills that will help you reduce apprehension in groups and meetings.

SOURCE: <https://spc1017.blogspot.com/2015/08/chapter-10-review.html> **Chapter 10 Review - Members and Leaders in Small Group Communication: Essentials of Human Communication (pages 1-5 of this lecture).**

### CHARACTERISTICS OF GROUPS

All groups have certain characteristics in common. Understanding these characteristics is the first step towards behaving more effectively. What Is a Group? Imagine that you're taking a test on group communication. Which of the following would you identify as groups? • A crowd of onlookers looking at a burning building • Several passengers at an airline ticket counter discussing their need to find space on a crowded flight • An army battalion Because all these situations seem to involve groups, your experience as a canny test taker probably tells you that a commonsense answer will get you in trouble here, and you're right. When social scientists talk about groups, they use the word in a special way that excludes each of the preceding examples.

For our purposes, a group consists of a small collection of people who interact with one another, usually face-to-face, over time in order to reach goals. None of the collections of people described in the previous bulleted list qualifies as a group. Without interaction, a collection of people isn't a group. Consider, for example, the onlookers at a fire. Though they all occupy the same area at a given time, they have virtually nothing to do with one another. Of course, if they should begin interacting-working together to give first aid to or rescue victims, for example the situation would change. This requirement of interaction highlights the difference between true groups and collections of individuals who merely co-act, simultaneously engaging in a similar activity without communicating with one another. Students who passively listen to a lecture don't technically constitute a group until they begin to exchange messages verbally and nonverbally with one another and their instructor. This explains why some students feel isolated even though they spend so much time on a crowded campus.

### Rules and Norms

Groups have formal rules-explicit officially stated guidelines that govern what the group is supposed to do and how the members should behave. Together with the official rules, an equally powerful set of standards also operate, often without being discussed. This is what we call NORMS. These are shared values, beliefs, behaviors, and procedures that govern a groups operation.

There are three categories of group norms;

1. Social
2. Procedural
3. Task

Social norms; Govern relationship of members to each other

Procedural norms; Outline how the group should operate

Task norms; Focus on how the job itself should be handled

### Roles

Where norms define acceptable group standards, roles refer to patterns of behavior expected of their members. Some roles are officially recognized. These formal roles are assigned to partly establish order. These roles often have a label e.g. treasurer. Some roles not recognized

by groups include functional roles. They describe the functions members can fill rather than their formal positions. These **informal roles** fall into categories; task and maintenance. **Task roles** help the group accomplish its goals and social roles help the group relationships among members run smoothly. For a group to work effectively, the presence of positive social roles and absence of **dysfunctional ones** are key ingredients.

The ideal ratio between task and social functions is 2:1, with the task-related behavior dominating. This balance allows the group to get its work done, while at the same time taking care of the personal needs and concerns of the members.

### **Role emergence**

Role emergence occurs in the following process: members will make bids for certain. A particularly analytical communicator might audition for the role critic by pointing out flaws in a proposal.

### **Role Related Problems and Solutions**

Groups can suffer from at least three –related problems. This may occur when:

1. One or more important informal roles- either task or social- go unfilled.
2. An overabundance of candidates; when the members become more concerned with occupying their pet position than with getting the group's job done.
3. When a group member suffers from role fixation that is acting out a role whether or not the situation requires it.

## **PATTERNS OF INTERACTION**

As communication involves exchange of information, these exchanges must be complete and efficient for communicators to reach their goal. The mathematical formula that identifies the number of possible interactions between individuals is

$$N(N-1)/2$$

WHERE N =the number of members in a group

Thus in even a relatively small five- member group, there are ten possible combinations of two-person conversations and 75 possible multi-person interactions.

A **SOCIOGRAM** will suggest the number of complexity of interactions

A physical arrangement influences communications in groups.

If group members always stayed together and shared every piece of information with one another, their interaction would resemble an all-channel network. Some follow the chain network and while others the wheel network.

## **DECISION MAKING METHODS**

Groups can be classified according to the approach they use to make decisions. Groups can decide matters in several different ways examining their advantages and disadvantages.

### **1. Authority rule**

Method often used by autocratic leaders.

Advantages

1. Quick in decision making.
2. Perfectly acceptable with routine matters that do not require discussion in order to gain approval.

**Disadvantages**

1. Even when a leader's decision is effective, failure to contact his members lead to a decrease in effectiveness.
2. **Majority control**  
A naïve belief is that this method is superior. Where the support of all members is not necessary, it is advantageous, but in more important decisions it is risky.
3. **Expert opinion**  
A group member will be given the power to make decisions. This method can only work if the person in question is truly superior.
4. **Minority control**  
A few members of the group make decisions.
5. **Consensus**  
Occurs when all members of a group support a decision in a group; full participation can increase the quality of the decision as well as the commitment of the members to support it.

**Advantages;**

1. Full participation increase quality of a decision

**Disadvantages;**

1. It takes a great deal of time
2. Very frustrating, given the power to make decisions. This method can only work if the person in question is truly superior.

**CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON GROUP COMMUNICATION**

Groups are influenced by a variety of factors, some are obvious and others less obvious. One of the most subtle and yet profound forces that shape groups' communication is the culture. In which they exist because it provides a set of unstated assumptions and rules that determine how members will behave toward one another and how they will tackle the job at hand.

Geert Hofstede's survey identifies 5 cultural forces that shape the attitudes and behaviors of groups and individuals.

**1. Individualism Vs Collectivism.**

Some cultures value the individual while others place great emphasis on the group. Individualistic countries contrast with collectivistic countries because members of individualistic cultures view their primary responsibility as being to themselves whereas members of collectivistic cultures feel loyalties and obligations to the groups of which they are members. E.g. family, community, organization one works for.

Members of individualistic societies gain most of their identity and self esteem from their own accomplishments while collective society's members are identified with groups to which they belong. Individualistic societies are also characterized by self-reliance and competition whereas collectivistic countries are more attentive to and concerned with the opinions of significant others. Approaches to communication are very different. Individualistic societies are relatively tolerant of conflicts using a direct solution-oriented approach. Collectivistic society is less direct.

As a result of all these, members of collectivistic countries are more likely to be team players while individualistic countries are more likely to produce and reward stars. Members of highly individualistic countries include North Americans who often need to control their desires to dominate group discussions and to "win" in problem-solving situations. By contrast members of collectivistic countries are more likely to favor harmony over speaking out.

**2. Power Distance**

Power distance is the degree to which members are willing to accept a difference in power and status between members of a group. Some cultures accept differences in power and status, while others accept them grudgingly, if at all. Most members of the U.S and Canada firmly believe in the principles of equality so the notion that some people are entitled to greater power or privileges doesn't come easily. In other cultures inequality is accepted as a fact of life.

In countries with high power distance group members might willingly subordinate themselves to a leader especially one whose title comes from socially accepted sources such as age, experience, training or status. Countries with low power distance are less likely to feel that many groups need a leader or that people who do occupy that role automatically deserve unquestioning obedience. E.g. supervisors, bosses, teachers etc. have the respect of the members mostly because they earn it. The members expect leaders to be more considerate of their interests and needs because they assume they're basically equal.

### **3. Uncertainty Avoidance.**

Some cultures accept risk, uncertainty and change while others characterized by uncertainty avoidance are uncomfortable with these unavoidable trends. Instead they favor stability and tradition those who don't like any surprises (the high uncertainty avoidance people), while those who are comfortable with change are referred to as the low uncertainty avoidance people. This affects the way members of groups communicate. Lower tolerance of uncertainty members is uncomfortable with ambiguous tasks and reluctant to take risks. They worry more about the future, are more loyal to employers accept, seniority as the basis for leadership. They view conflicts as undesirable and are likely to compromise when disagreements arise.

Higher tolerance for uncertainty is more willing to take risks, more accepting of change and more willing to break rules for pragmatic reasons. They accept conflicts as natural and are willing to compromise when disagreements occur. Countries whose members tend to avoid surprises include Greece, Portugal, Turkey, Mexico, and Israel.

### **4. Tasks Vs Social Orientation.**

These categories are labeled "masculine" and "feminine" based on traditional views that men are assertive and results oriented while women are nurturing, and since in this era of increasingly flexible sex roles these terms are considered sexist and misleading. More appropriate labels groups with strong task orientation (high task orientation) focus on getting the job done examples Japan, Austria, and Mexico etc. High degrees of social orientation are more likely to be concerned about feelings of members and their smooth functioning as a team examples are Scandinavian countries, Chile and Portugal etc.

When we compare countries like Canada and the U.S. to high social oriented countries, the states falls slightly towards the task oriented side and Canada is almost exactly in the middle because it's balanced between task and social concerns. Task oriented societies focus on making the team more competent through training and use of up-to-date methods. Members are highly concerned with individual success. Social oriented societies focus on collective concerns: co-operative problem solving, maintaining a friendly atmosphere and good physical working conditions. Members might be reluctant in solving problems if personal costs to members in stress and hard feelings maybe a consequence.

### **5. Short Vs Long-Term Orientation.**

Some cultures look for quick pay offs, while people with different backgrounds are willing to defer gratification in pursuit of long-range goals. Willingness to work hard for a future pay off is common among East African cultures. Western industrialized cultures are more focused on short results. As long as people share the same orientation toward pay offs chances for

harmony are good but when some people push for a quick fix while others urge patience, conflicts are likely to arise. A good example is the way some greedy individuals in Kenya invest in the real-estate using short cuts to complete their projects and in the end the hurt other people or even kill.

Cultural values shape what groups communicate about and how they interact. Cultural differences don't account for every difference in group functioning, but they provide a common set of assumptions that exert a subtle yet powerful effect on communication.

### **INFORMATION-SHARING GROUPS**

The purpose of information-sharing groups is to acquire new information or skills by sharing knowledge. In most of these groups, all members have something to teach and something to learn; a good example is a group of students sharing information to prepare for an exam. In others, the group interaction takes place because some members have information and some do not. An example is a discussion between a patient and a health care professional.

### *EDUCATIONAL OR LEARNING GROUPS*

Members of educational or learning groups may follow a variety of discussion patterns. For example, a historical topic, such as the development of free speech or equal rights, might be explored chronologically, with the discussion progressing from the past into the present and, perhaps, into predictions of the future. A group might discuss the legal profession by itemizing and discussing each of the profession's major functions. Another might consider a corporation's structure in terms of its major divisions. Groups could further systematize each of these topics by, say, listing the legal profession's functions in order of importance or complexity, or ordering the corporation's major structures in terms of decision-making power.

### *FOCUS GROUPS*

A different type of information sharing group is the focus group, a small group that is assembled and subjected to a kind of in-depth interview, often for market research. The aim of conducting a focus group is to discover through a sample of individuals what it is that people in general think about an issue or product; for example, what do men between 18 and 25 think of a particular brand of aftershave lotion and its packaging? In the focus group, a leader/interviewer tries to discover the members' beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and feelings to use as a guide for decisions on, for example, changing the scent or redesigning the packaging. It is the leader's task to prod members of the focus group to analyze their thoughts and feelings on a deeper level and to use the thoughts of one member to stimulate the thoughts of others. Generally, a focus group leader, who is usually a professional facilitator rather than a member of the hosting organization itself, assembles approximately 12 people who represent the general population. The leader explains the process, the time limits, and the general goal of the group.

### **PERSONAL GROWTH GROUPS**

Some personal growth groups) sometimes referred to as support groups, aim to help members cope with particular difficulties-such as drug addiction, not being assertive enough, being an ex-convict, or dealing with an alcoholic parent, a hyperactive child, or a promiscuous spouse. Other groups are more clearly therapeutic and are designed to change significant aspects of an individual's personality or behavior. Still other groups are devoted to making healthy individuals function even more effectively. Because personal growth groups vary widely in their procedures, it's not possible to provide a standard pattern that all such groups follow (as is the case with brainstorming groups, discussed above, or with problem-solving groups, discussed later in this chapter). But let's look briefly at four well-known types of personal

growth groups: (1) the encounter group, (2) the assertiveness training group, (3) the consciousness-raising group, and (4) the intervention group.

A word of caution should be injected here: Personal growth groups are highly personal and ego-involving; and although they will all seem easy and reasonable to set up and participate in, they are actually very complex and difficult. They are discussed here (briefly) to give you an idea of the types of personal growth groups available rather than to provide a set of guidelines for using these groups.

#### *THE ENCOUNTER GROUP*

The encounter group, also known as the "sensitivity group" or "T [Training] group" constitutes a form of psychotherapy; these groups try to facilitate members' personal growth and foster their ability to deal effectively with other people (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 2002; Rogers, 1970). One of the encounter group's assumptions is that the members will be more effective, both psychologically and interpersonally, if they get to know and like themselves better. Consequently, members are encouraged to look at themselves and their relationships honestly and in depth and to react to others in the group openly and honestly. Members are encouraged to express their inner thoughts, fears, and doubts in the encounter group, in which interactions are always characterized by total acceptance and support.

#### *THE ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING GROUP*

The assertiveness training group aims to increase the willingness of its members to stand up for their rights and to act more assertively in a wide variety of situations (Adler, 1977; Bishop, 2006). Distinctions are made between being assertive (which is good and effective); being nonassertive (which is ineffective, because your own '...rants and needs are unlikely to be met); and being aggressive (which also is ineffective, because it contributes to escalating the conflict and causing resentment). The group aim); to increase the assertiveness skill); of its members, who are likely to be individuals who feel they are not assertive enough. The skill of assertiveness is covered in more detail in the discussion of verbal messages in Chapter 4.

#### *THE CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING GROUP*

The consciousness-raising group aims to help people cope with the problems society confronts them with. The members of this type of group all have one characteristic in common (for example, they may all be women, unwed mothers, gay fathers, or recently unemployed executives). It's this commonality that leads the members to join together and help one another. In the consciousness-raising group the assumption is that similar people are best equipped to assist one another's personal growth. The procedures generally followed are simple: A topic is selected, and each member speaks on the topic as it relates to the general group topic. For example, if the group consists of unwed mothers, then whatever the topic (taxes, children, school, prejudice), the members address it in the context of the group's focus on unwed motherhood. No interruptions are allowed. After each member has finished, the other group members may ask questions of clarification. The feedback from other members is to be totally supportive. After the last member has spoken, a general discussion follows. This procedure is designed to help raise members' consciousness by giving them an opportunity to formulate and verbalize their thoughts on a particular topic, hear how others feel and think about the same topic, and formulate and answer questions of clarification.

#### *THE INTERVENTION GROUP*

In the intervention group participants gather to help one of their members overcome some problem. For example, family members may join together to confront an alcoholic parent or sibling. Other commonly confronted issues are drug, gambling, and sex addiction and eating disorders. Usually a leader is designated (sometimes a professional intervention leader and sometimes a group member). Under the leader's guidance the group members express their support and love for the person with the problem behavior explain the impact of this member's behavior on all connected others, and offer to help the person. As you can imagine, the skills of empathy, supportiveness, and immediacy are especially important in the intervention.

### **PROBLEM-SOLVING GROUPS**

A problem-solving group meets to solve a particular problem or to reach a decision on some issue. In a sense, this is the most demanding kind of group. It requires not only knowledge of small group communication techniques but also a thorough knowledge of the particular problem on the part of all group members. Also, for the most successful outcome, it usually demands faithful adherence to a set of procedural rules.

### **THE PROBLEM-SOLVING SEQUENCE**

The problem-solving sequence identifies six steps and owes its formulation to philosopher John Dewey's insights into how people think. These steps are designed to make problem solving more efficient and effective.

#### **Step 1: Define and Analyze the Problem**

In some instances, the nature of the problem is clearly specified. For example, a work team might discuss how to package new tablets or smart phones Valentine's Day. In other instances, however, the problem may be vague, and it may be up to the group to define it—for example, the general topic of poor campus communications. In this case, the topic has to be more clearly defined and limited—for example, how the college website can be improved. Define the problem as an open-ended question ("How can we improve the college website?" rather than as a statement ("The website needs to be improved") or as a yes/no question ("Does the website need improvement?").

#### **Step 2: Establish Criteria for Evaluating Solutions**

Decide how you'll evaluate the solutions before proposing them. Identify the standards or criteria you'll use in evaluating solutions or in preferring one solution over another. For example, you might decide that a solution must lead to a 10 percent increase in website visits, that the solutions must not increase the budget, that the website information must not violate anyone's right to privacy, or that the website must provide a forum for all members of the college community. Set up criteria that are realistic and that can, in fact, be attained; otherwise, no solution is going to prove acceptable.

#### **Step 3: Identify Possible Solutions**

Identify as many solutions as possible. Focus on quantity rather than quality. Brainstorming may be particularly useful at this point. Solutions to the website improvement problem might include incorporating reviews of faculty publications, student evaluations of specific courses, reviews of restaurants in the campus area, outlines for new courses, and employment information.

#### **Step 4: Evaluate Solutions**

After all solutions have been proposed, evaluate each one. For example, does incorporating reviews of area restaurants meet the criteria? Would it increase the budget, for example? Would posting grades violate students' rights to privacy? Each potential solution should be matched against the evaluating criteria.

### **Step 5: Select the Best Solution(s)**

Select the best solution and put it into operation. Let's assume that reviews of faculty publications and outlines for new courses best meet the evaluating criteria for solutions. The group might then incorporate these two new items into the website. Groups use different decision-making methods when deciding, for example, which solution to accept. The method to be used should, naturally, be stated at the outset of the group discussion.

#### ***Three main decision-making methods can be followed:***

- **Authority:** In decision making by authority, group members voice their feelings and opinions, but the leader or boss makes the final decision. This method has the advantages of being efficient and of giving greater importance to the suggestions of more experienced members. The disadvantage is that members may feel that their contributions have too little influence and therefore may not participate with real enthusiasm.
- **Majority rule:** The group agrees to abide by the majority decision and may vote on various issues as the group searches to solve its problem. Like decision by authority, this method is efficient. A disadvantage is that it may lead the group to limit discussion by calling for a vote once a majority has agreed. Also, members not voting with the majority may feel disenfranchised and left out.
- **Consensus:** In small group decision making, consensus means reaching agreement. The agreement does not have to be unanimous; it is, rather, something that the group members can live with; they agree that they can do whatever the group's solution requires (Kelly, 1994). It does not imply that each individual group member agrees with the solution, but only, that members agree that at this time (for this situation, for this group) this solution should be adopted and followed. Consensus is the most time-consuming of the decision-making methods. However, it is also the method that best secures the cooperation and participation of all members in implementing the group's decisions. If you want members of the group to be satisfied with and committed to the decision consensus seems to be the best way to arrive at a solution (Beebe & Masterson, 2012)

### **Step 6: Test Selected Solutions**

After putting solutions into operation, test their effectiveness. The group might, for example, poll the students or college employees about the new website. Or the group might analyze the number of visits to the website to see if the number of visits increases by the desired 10 percent. If the selected solutions prove ineffective, the group will need to return to a previous stage and repeat that part of the process. This often involves selecting other solutions to test. But it also may mean going even farther back in the process-to a reanalysis of the problem, an identification of other solutions, or a restatement of criteria, for example.

## **PROBLEM-SOLVING GROUPS AT WORK**

The problem-solving sequence discussed here is used widely in a variety of different types of business groups. Let's examine three popular approaches that rely largely on the problem-solving techniques just discussed: (1) the nominal group technique. (2) The Delphi method, and (3) quality circles. As you read these discussions, realize that the available technology will dictate some of the ways in which these groups operate. If the members only have a whiteboard, then much will be recorded on the board. If all members have computers

connected to the company website, then much of the record keeping will go onto the website and at the same time into each laptop or tablet.

### **The Nominal Group Technique**

The nominal group technique is a method of problem solving that uses limited discussion and confidential voting to obtain a group decision. It's especially helpful when some members may be reluctant to voice their opinions in a regular problem solving group or when the issue is controversial or sensitive. The nominal group technique can be divided into eight steps [Kelly 1994]:

1. The problem is defined and clarified for all members.
2. Each member writes down (without discussion or consultation with others) his or her ideas on or possible solutions to the problem.
3. Each member-in sequence-states one idea from his or her list, which is recorded on a board or flip chart so everyone can see it. This process is repeated until all suggestions are stated and recorded.
4. Each suggestion is clarified (without debate). Ideally, each suggestion is given equal time.
5. Each member rank-orders the suggestions in writing.
6. The rankings of the members are combined to get a group ranking, which is then written on the board.
7. Clarification, discussion, and possible reordering may follow.
8. The highest-ranking or several high-ranking solutions may then be put into operation and tested.

### **The Delphi Method**

In the Delphi method a group of "experts" is established, but there's no interaction among them; instead, they communicate by repeatedly responding to questionnaires (Kelly, 1994; Tersine & Riggs, 1980). The Delphi method is especially useful when you want to involve people who are geographically distant from one another, when you want all members to become part of the solution and to uphold it, or when you want to minimize the effects of dominant members or even of peer pressure. The method is best explained as a series of eight steps (Kelly, 1994):

1. The problem is defined (for example, "We need to improve intradepartmental communication"). What each member is expected to do is specified (for example, each member should contribute five ideas on this specific question).
2. Each member then anonymously contributes five ideas in writing.
3. The ideas of all members are combined, written up, and distributed to all members.
4. Members then select the three or four best ideas from this composite list and submit these.
5. From these responses another list is produced and distributed to all members.
6. Members then select the one or two best ideas from the new list and submit these.
7. From these responses another list is produced and distributed to all members. The process may be repeated any number of times, but usually three rounds are sufficient for achieving a fair degree of agreement.
8. The "final" solutions are identified and are communicated to all members.

### **Quality Circles**

A quality circle is a group of employees (usually about 6 to 12) whose task it is to investigate and make recommendations for improving the quality of some organizational function. The members are drawn from the workers whose area is being studied; for example, if the problem were how to improve advertising on the Internet, then the quality circle membership

would be drawn from the advertising and technology departments. The basic assumption is that people who work on similar tasks will be best able to improve their departments or jobs by pooling their insights and working through problems they share. Quality circle members investigate problems using any method they feel might be helpful; for example, they may form face-to-face problem-solving groups or use nominal groups or Delphi methods. The group then reports its findings and suggestions to those who can implement the proposals.

SOURCE: <https://spc1017.blogspot.com/2015/08/chapter-10-review.html> **Chapter 10 Review - Members and Leaders in Small Group Communication: Essentials of Human Communication.**

## PROBLEM SOLVING IN GROUPS: WHEN AND WHY

Is group problem solving a waste of effort, or is it the best way to manage a task? As with most matters, the truth falls somewhere between these two extremes. Groups do have their shortcomings, which we will discuss in this lecture. But extensive research has shown that when these shortcomings can be avoided, groups are clearly the most effective way to handle many tasks.

### Advantages of Group Problem Solving

Research over fifty years that has compared problem solving by groups to that by individuals shows that, in most cases, groups can produce more solutions to a problem than individuals working alone—and that the solutions will be of higher quality. Groups have proved superior at a wide range of tasks—everything from assembling jigsaw puzzles to solving complex reasoning problems. There are several reasons why groups are effective.

### Types of Problem-Solving Groups

This list of problem-solving formats and approaches is not exhaustive, but it provides a sense of how a group's structure can shape its ability to come up with high-quality solutions.

**Buzz groups** When the number of members is too large for effective discussion, **buzz groups** can be used to maximize effective participation. In this approach, subgroups (usually consisting of five to seven members) simultaneously address an issue and then report back to the group at large. The best ideas of each buzz group are then assembled to form a high-quality decision.

**Problem census** This approach is useful when groups want to identify important issues or problems. **Problem census** works especially well when some members are more vocal than others, because it equalizes participation. Members use a separate card to list each of their ideas. The leader collects all cards and reads them to the group one by one, posting each on a board visible to everyone. Because the name of the person who contributed each item isn't listed, issues are separated from personalities. As similar items are read, the leader posts and arranges them in clusters. After all items are read and posted, the leader and members consolidate similar items into a number of ideas that the group needs to address.

**Focus groups** are used as a market research tool to enable sponsoring organizations to learn how potential users or the public at large regards a new product or idea. Unlike other groups discussed here, focus groups don't include decision makers or other members who claim any expertise on a subject. Instead, their comments are used by decision makers to figure out how people in the wider world might react to ideas.

**Parliamentary procedure** Problem-solving meetings can follow a variety of formats. A

session that uses **parliamentary procedure** observes specific rules about how topics may be discussed and decisions made. The standard reference book for parliamentary procedure is the revised edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*. Although the parliamentary rules may seem stilted and cumbersome, when well used, they do keep a discussion on track and protect the rights of the minority against domination by the majority.

**Panel discussion** Another common problem-solving format is the **panel discussion**, in which the participants talk over the topic informally, much as they would in an ordinary conversation. A leader (called a “moderator” in public discussions) may help the discussion along by encouraging the comments of some members, cutting off overly talkative ones, and seeking consensus when the time comes for making a decision.

**Symposium** In a **symposium** the participants divide the topic in a manner that allows each member to deliver in-depth information without interruption. Although this format lends itself to good explanations of each person's decision, the one-person-at-a-time nature of a symposium won't lead to a group decision. The contributions of the members must be followed by the give-and-take of an open discussion.

### **Forum**

A **forum** allows nonmembers to add their opinions to the group's deliberations before the group makes a decision. This approach is commonly used by public agencies to encourage the participation of citizens in the decisions that affect them.

## **APPROACHES AND STAGES IN PROBLEM SOLVING**

Groups may have the potential to solve problems effectively, but they don't always live up to this potential. What makes some groups succeed and others fail? Researchers spent much of the twentieth century asking this question. Two useful answers emerged from their work.

### **A Structured Problem-Solving Approach**

Although we often pride ourselves on facing problems rationally, social scientists have discovered that much of the time logic and reason play little part in the way we make decisions.<sup>8</sup> The tendency to use nonrational approaches is unfortunate, because research shows that, to a great degree, a group's effectiveness is determined by whether or not it approaches a problem rationally and systematically.<sup>9</sup> Just as a poor blueprint or a shaky foundation can weaken a house, groups can fail by skipping one or more of the necessary steps in solving a problem.

As early as 1910, John Dewey introduced his famous “reflective thinking” method as a systematic method for solving problems.<sup>10</sup> Since then, other experts have suggested modifications of Dewey's approach. Some emphasize answering key questions, whereas others seek “ideal solutions” that meet the needs of all members. Research comparing various methods has clearly shown that, although no single approach is best for all situations, a structured procedure produces better results than “no pattern” discussions.<sup>11</sup>

The following problem-solving model contains the elements common to most structured approaches developed in the last eighty years:

1. Identify the problem
  - a. What are the group's goals?
  - b. What are individual members' goals?
2. Analyze the problem
  - a. Word the problem as a probative question
  - b. Gather relevant information

- c. Identify impelling and restraining forces
- 3. Develop creative solutions through brainstorming or the nominal group technique
  - a. Avoid criticism at this stage
  - b. Encourage “freewheeling” ideas
  - c. Develop a large number of ideas
  - d. Combine two or more individual ideas
- 4. Evaluate the solutions by asking which solution:
  - a. Will best produce the desired changes
  - b. Is most achievable
  - c. Contains the fewest serious disadvantages
- 5. Implement the plan
  - a. Identify specific tasks
  - b. Determine necessary resources
  - c. Define individual responsibilities
  - d. Provide for emergencies
- 6. Follow up on the solution
  - a. Meet to evaluate progress
  - b. Revise approach as necessary

**IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM** Sometimes a group’s problem is easy to identify. The crew of a sinking ship, for example, doesn’t need to conduct a discussion to understand that its goal is to avoid drowning or being eaten by a large fish.

There are many times, however, when the problems facing a group aren’t so clear. As an example, think of an athletic team stuck deep in last place well into the season. At first the problem seems obvious: an inability to win any games. But a closer look at the situation might show that there are unmet goals—and thus other problems. For instance, individual members may have goals that aren’t tied directly to winning: making friends, receiving acknowledgment as good athletes, not to mention the simple goal of having fun—of playing in the recreational sense of the word.

**ANALYZE THE PROBLEM** After you have identified the general nature of the problem facing the group, you are ready to look at the problem in more detail. There are several steps you can follow to accomplish this important job.

**DEVELOP CREATIVE SOLUTIONS** After the group has set up a list of criteria for success, the next job is to develop a number of ways to reach its goal. Considering more than one solution is important, because the first solution may not be the best one. During this development stage, creativity is essential.<sup>13</sup> The biggest danger is the tendency of members to defend their own idea and criticize others’. This kind of behavior leads to two problems. First, evaluative criticism almost guarantees a defensive reaction from members whose ideas have been attacked. Second, evaluative criticism stifles creativity.

**EVALUATE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS** After it has listed possible solutions, the group can evaluate the usefulness of each.

**IMPLEMENT THE PLAN** Everyone who makes New Year’s resolutions knows the difference between making a decision and carrying it out.

**FOLLOW UP ON THE SOLUTION** Even the best plans usually require some modifications after they're put into practice. You can improve the group's effectiveness and minimize disappointment by following two steps.

1. *Meet Periodically to Evaluate Progress.* Follow-up meetings should be part of virtually every good plan. The best time to schedule these meetings is as you put the group's plan to work. At that time, a good leader or member will suggest: "Let's get together in a week (or a few days or a month, depending on the nature of the task). We can see how things are going and take care of any problems."
2. *Revise the Group's Approach as Necessary.* These follow-up meetings will often go beyond simply congratulating everyone for coming up with a good solution. Problems are bound to arise, and these periodic meetings, in which the key players are present, are the place to solve them.

### Developmental Stages in Problem-Solving Groups

When it comes to solving problems in groups, research shows that the shortest distance to a solution isn't always a straight line. Communication scholar Aubrey Fisher analyzed tape recordings of problem-solving groups and discovered that many successful groups seem to follow a four-stage process when arriving at a decision.<sup>16</sup> As you read about his findings, visualize how they have applied to problem-solving groups in your experience.

In the **orientation stage**, members approach the problem and one another tentatively. In some groups people may not know one another well, and even in ones where they are well acquainted they may not know one another's position on the issue at hand. After members understand the problem and become acquainted, a successful group enters the **conflict stage**. During this stage, members take strong positions and defend them against those who oppose their viewpoint. Coalitions are likely to form, and the discussion may become polarized. The conflict needn't be personal: It can focus on the issues at hand while preserving the members' respect for one another. Even when the climate does grow contentious, conflict seems to be a necessary stage in group development. The give-and-take of discussion tests the quality of ideas, and weaker ones may suffer a well-deserved death here.

After a period of conflict, effective groups move to an **emergence stage**. One idea might emerge as the best one, or the group might combine the best parts of several plans into a new solution. As they approach consensus, members back off from their dogmatic positions. Statements become more tentative again: "I guess that's a pretty good idea," "I can see why you think that way."

Finally, an effective group reaches the **reinforcement stage**. At this point not only do members accept the group's decision, but also they endorse it. Whereas members used evidence to back up differing positions in the conflict stage, now they find evidence that will support the decision. Even if members disagree with the outcome, they do not voice their concerns. There is an unspoken drive toward consensus and harmony.

### Decision-Making Methods

There are several approaches a group can use to make decisions. We'll look at each of them now, examining their advantages and disadvantages. **Consensus** When all members of a group support a decision we say they have achieved consensus. The advantages of consensus are obvious. Full participation can increase the quality of the decision as well as the

commitment of the members to support it. Consensus is especially important in decisions on critical or complex matters. In such cases, methods involving less input can diminish the quality of or enthusiasm for a decision. Despite its advantages, consensus also has its disadvantages. It can take a great deal of time, which makes it unsuitable for emergencies. In addition, it is often very frustrating. Emotions can run high on important matters, and patience in the face of such pressures is difficult. Because of the need to deal with these emotional pressures, consensus calls for more communication skill than do other decision-making approaches. As with many things in life, consensus has high rewards, which come at a proportionately high cost. Majority Control A naive belief of many people (perhaps coming from overzealous high school civics teachers) is that the democratic method of majority rule is always superior. This method does have its advantages in matters in which the support of all members isn't necessary, but in more important matters it is risky. Remember that even if a 51% majority of the members favors a plan, 49% might still oppose it-hardly sweeping support for any decision that needs the support of all members in order to work Besides producing unhappy members, decisions made under majority rule are often inferior to decisions hashed out by a group until the members reach consensus. Under majority rule, members who recognize that they are outvoted often participate less, and the deliberations usually end after a majority opinion has formed, even though minority viewpoints might be worthwhile.

#### Summary



Groups play an important part in our lives, family, education, friendship and so on, they possess several characteristics that distinguish them from other communication contexts. This is because groups involve interaction over time among a small number of participants, with the purpose of achieving one or more goals.

Groups have their own goals, as do individual members. At times individual and group goals are compatible and sometimes they conflict since individual members are both task oriented and social.

Groups can be put into several classifications; learning, growth, problem solving and social. Different types of groups share certain characteristics. The existence of group norms, individual roles of members, patterns of interactions that are shaped by a group's structure and the choice of one or more ways of reaching decisions.

The culture in which groups operate influences the way members communicate with one another. The ways in which culture influences interactions are: individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and task vs. social orientation

- I. The most common groups are learning, growth, social, and problem-solving.
  - A. A group offers more in the way of resources, accuracy, and commitment than are available to you as an individual.
  - B. Problem-solving groups are justified when the job is beyond the capacity of one person, individual tasks are interdependent, there is more than one

- possible decision or solution, and there is potential for disagreement.
- II. Groups adapt varied settings, reasons, and presentation styles to solve problems.
    - A. *Breakout groups, problem census, focus groups, parliamentary procedure rules, panel discussion, symposium, and forum groups* are some of the formats used to shape the ability to coordinate solutions.
    - B. Virtual groups are convenient for ease of scheduling, independence of participants, and anonymity-enhanced courage of contributors.
    - C. An effective problem-solving group uses a structured rational approach to identify the problem, analyze the problem, develop creative solutions, evaluate the solutions, implement the plan, and follow up.
    - D. Successful groups seem to follow a four-stage process consisting of *orientation stage, conflict stage, emergence stage, and reinforcement stage*.
  - III. Groups are most effective when members have mutual respect and *cohesiveness*.
    - A. Cohesiveness and productivity are connected.
    - B. Cohesiveness is no guarantee of success, but it helps.
    - C. Group communication dangers to overcome include message *information underload or overload*, unequal participation, and pressure to conform to *groupthink*.

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