

GROUP DYNAMICS

Overview

This section addresses the factors influencing group dynamics, outlines styles of leadership, and provides some exercises that can be used to build trust and enhance group dynamics.

Factors Influencing Group Dynamics

The following factors all influence how group members interact with each other during a training. Essentially, you as a trainer need to be aware of who is participating and how culture, gender, power, status, or emotions may influence participation and interaction. This is particularly important if the group you are training is multi-cultural or if you are from a different culture than the majority of your participants.

Culture. Culture influences how gender, power, status, or emotions play out in a social setting. You should attempt to be both respectful of cultural norms but also encourage and create an atmosphere where all participants are comfortable, which may go against some cultural norms (like having people from different status groups work together). As a trainer working in cultural settings different from your own, you should also be respectful of dress codes and social interaction prescriptions.

Gender. Different cultures have specific gender roles. Gender refers to the socially and culturally prescribed roles for males and females. Gender is not biologically determined. In some settings, cultural prescriptions dictate that women should not interact in a social setting with men. Other more subtle influences might be related to cultural prescriptions about the ways in which women contribute to discussions or the frequency of their contributions. As a trainer, you should be aware of how gender influences the ways women and men participate. The exercises you choose should not violate cultural or gender norms, such as having men and women touch each other. In some cases, you may want to adapt an exercise to respect these norms (like pairing men with men or women with women in exercises that require physical interaction).

Power. Power in a training appears in different ways. In terms of group dynamics, several people tend to take on leadership roles, while others follow. Still others dominate discussions by interrupting fellow participants, speaking loudly or often. As a trainer, your role is to ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to participate and feel comfortable participating. The different activities to enhance group dynamics or using tools to ensure full participation (see below) will assist you in creating and maintaining a comfortable and safe atmosphere for all participants.

Status. Different cultural groups have different ways of measuring status. Possible indicators of status, caste, or class include: education level, family ties, political or economic clout, ownership of land or other property. In some instances, individuals with

lower status will feel uncomfortable interacting with individuals with higher status, while in other settings, the opposite will be true. Often participants will assume that you, as a trainer, have higher status and will defer to you. As a trainer, you need to be aware of status differences, but do your best not to imply or reinforce that some individuals have more worth because of their status. All participants have contributions to make in the training sessions and to peacebuilding programming.

Emotions. People vary on an individual level and on a cultural level in terms of their comfort with expressing emotions. Some individuals will not be embarrassed by showing intense emotion (e.g. crying to express sadness or anger), while others will. Indeed, in some cultures, argument or intense emotions are not negative but instead express interest and involvement in a discussion or conversation. Know your own comfort zone with emotion because this will affect your ability, as a trainer, to deal with emotion during training sessions.

Stages of Group Formation

In some cases, training participants will not know each other prior to the training. In other cases, some individuals will have worked with each other before, while others will be newcomers to the group. In all cases, the group of participants will pass through four stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, and performing (Weber, 1982; Handy, 1985).

In the *forming* stage, the participants in the training are a collection of individuals, usually without a set of common experiences that unites them. Each individual has his or her own life and work experience, and each will have varying levels of exposure to the concept of peacebuilding. As these individuals become more familiar with each other, they will pass through a *storming* phase. In the storming phase, group members challenge each other's personal beliefs, take on or reject particular roles and responsibilities. The group establishes its objectives and the way it deals with conflict during this phase. In situations with a great deal of conflict and tension, the group will usually collapse. Groups that discover commonalities will achieve a sense of togetherness, cohesion, and purpose.

Groups that survive the storming phase begin to establish a specific group identity with its own norms of behaviour and interaction. In the *norming* stage, the group settles into a routine. Group members get to know each other better and build trust in one another. At this point, the group enters the *performing* stage, where they work effectively as a team. Group members have confidence in each other, their abilities, and their work as a team. Members will feel comfortable taking significant risks and trying out new ideas.

Dealing with Group Conflict and Difficult People

As the above section indicated, conflict is a natural part of group interactions. As a trainer, your role will be manage conflict so that it does not destroy the group.

Group conflict may erupt between cliques (sub-groups of individuals within the group), between participants, between a participant and a clique, between a participant and a trainer, or between a clique and a trainer. For example, sub-groups of participants may clash over decisions or ideas presented in the training, sometimes leading to open conflict within a session. Alternatively, individual participants will inevitably disagree and arguments may occur between individuals. In another instance, a sub-group of participants may have common experiences or interests and either purposely or unconsciously exclude other individuals from "joining" their clique, thus leading to conflict. Or, an individual who was designated to attend the training by a supervisor may resent having to attend the

training and may take out his or her anger on you as the trainer. Lastly, a sub-group may express dislike for you as a trainer by trying to prove you are wrong, drawing you into an argument, or trying to make you lose face (Pretty *et al.*, 1995, p.42). Allegiances within the group and within sub-groups are likely to change as the training progresses.

In many workshops, one or several individuals are likely to either dominate discussions or try to interrupt discussion or presentations. This may take the form of unhelpful comments, like blaming comments or generalisations. In other cases, an individual may challenge the facilitator or withdraw from discussions and become completely silent. In *dealing with difficult people*, you should remember that his or her actions are likely not meant as a personal attack on you. The suggestions below (adapted from Pretty *et al.*, 1995, p.43) are meant to provide you with some options:

- ❖ Confront the person individually, preferably soon after you identify what is happening. This is usually most effectively done outside of the group and not in a training session. Try to understand what is going on or bothering the individual.
- ❖ Invite positive participation. You may want to give the individual a particular responsibility, such as conducting a training session, reporting to the group, or organising an activity, to transform their participation in a more constructive manner.
- ❖ Ask another participant or a fellow trainer to intervene and talk to the individual. The one who intervenes should have a good personal relationship with the individual.

Leadership and Decision-Making Styles

As mentioned above, groups eventually establish norms for making decisions. Individuals often play key roles in decision-making processes within groups. In large groups, individual leaders surface, sometimes through their actions while at other times group members defer to their leadership abilities. Their decision-making styles will have a direct impact on the group's decision-making style and the levels of satisfaction with group work. This session is included in the manual to introduce you to different styles of leadership and decision-making. While few of the training activities will involve extensive decision-making it is helpful to think about how leadership styles are tied to the way leaders and groups make decisions.

There are three general styles of leadership: authoritarian leadership, consultative leadership, and enabling leadership. These styles of leadership (adapted from Hope and Timmel III, 1995, and source unknown) are marked by different ways of making decisions. Each is useful in different situations.

Authoritarian leadership is useful in situations of survival, when decisions need to be made quickly and the leader has all the information he or she needs to make a decision.

- 1) You, as leader, make the decision alone. You decide without discussing the situation with anyone. You rely entirely on personal knowledge or on information available from written documents.
- 2) You present your decision but “sell” it to group members. You announce your decision and share the reasons behind it, which were prepared in advance.
- 3) You present your decision and invite questions of clarification. You announce your decision but respond to questions on an impromptu basis with a rationale based on the questions of clarification from group members. You have a dialogue, but express no willingness to change your decision.

Consultative leadership is useful with a strong leader combined with a group that is newly formed or insecure about its role or identity.

- 4) You present a tentative decision that is subject to change. You announce your decision; ask for questions of clarification and dialogue, indicating that your decision can be modified based on the group’s input.
- 5) You seek information and then decide alone. You ask for additional information from one or more of your co-workers or peers to use in making the decision, and facilitate a discussion about information, assumptions, and suggestions. You make the final decision.
- 6) You consult with select individuals, and then you decide alone. You ask the group to identify the situation and limitations, explore options, and make a decision contingent upon your veto power.

Enabling leadership is useful when the goal is to allow group members to participate fully in decision-making. Enabling leadership requires time and commitment on the part of the leader and the group and promotes a sense of shared responsibility for the decision and the outcome of the decision.

- 7) You define limits, but call upon members of the group to make the decision. You share any “givens” (e.g. funds available, time parameters) and facilitate a discussion by members on the basis of limitations.
- 8) You call on members of the group to identify limits, explore the situation, and make a decision. You act as a facilitator, allowing group members to define the problem, identify the limitations, explore options, and make a decision.

Question for reflection: In what specific situation is each style appropriate?

Activities for Enhancing Group Dynamics

An essential part of training is developing good group dynamics. The following exercises are useful for enhancing group dynamics and building trust among participants. You should integrate these exercises into your training schedule during the planning stage, especially at the beginning of the sessions to help individuals become familiar and comfortable with each other and to build trust among participants and between you as a trainer and participants. You should also be familiar with these exercises and use them as appropriate during the sessions, such as recreating or reinforcing a sense of group cohesion after a divisive exercise.

TRAINING EVALUATION

Overview

This section stresses the importance of evaluating training workshops and offers suggestions on when and how to go about it.

Timing Suggestions

The timing of evaluations depends, in part, on how long the training workshop is. If the training is only half a day, or a day long, then one evaluation *near the end of the day* may be appropriate. If the training is several days long, it will be helpful to include an evaluation session *mid-way* through the workshop to assess whether or not the training is meeting participants' expectations, or if it should be redirected. It is important not to leave evaluation to the very end, because then feedback provided by the participants cannot be used to improve their training experience, and it can give the message that such feedback is not welcome.

Many trainers prefer to include a process of *on-going* feedback throughout, such as the graffiti boards exercise listed below. An ongoing process of feedback allows the trainer to know how the training is going throughout the process, and can be used as a technique to help participants remember material that the training covers when the feedback is tied very deliberately to content.

Ways to Evaluate

Participants can give feedback verbally or in written form, individually or in groups, and publicly or anonymously. Each of these approaches has benefits and drawbacks. Getting suggestions in writing allows you to process feedback over a longer period of time, and can give participants a chance to reflect while they write. Getting suggestions verbally gives the trainer an opportunity to probe participant feedback to make it clearer or to focus on a particular exercise or training module. Public feedback, whether written or verbal,

provides participants with a chance to expand on what others say, and find out whether other participants agree or disagree. Anonymous feedback allows participants to feel freer to share their opinions, knowing that they will not be identified and held directly accountable, but it does not allow participants to discuss opinions or experiences with others and gather the group's opinion on an exercise or learning experience.