

Structuring the Group

Group Skills Preview

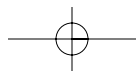
In this chapter, you will learn to do the following:

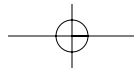
- *Develop a constructive role identity in a group*
- *Identify and follow norms established in your group*
- *Initiate an effective norm in your group*
- *Help your group communicate in an open network*
- *Socialize a new member into a group*
- *Determine what stage of group development your group is at and adjust your communication behavior accordingly*

As discussed in Chapter 1, group structure develops from the relationships among group members. As members talk to one another, patterns start to emerge. Once formed, group structure also predicts how group members will interact in the future. In fact, a group's structure can be so prominent that it is difficult to change. Group structure creates a foundation for the group. When structure is present, members can more easily identify with the group. In turn, this enhances members' interdependence and commitment to group goals. Groups develop structure by adopting formal and informal roles, creating group norms of behavior, and building networks of communication. But group structure can change when membership changes and the group develops over time.

Group Member Roles

It is the communication process that transforms a collection of people (a grouping) into a group. In that process, formal roles emerge, are assumed, or are assigned. Formal roles are those we can easily label: leader or chair, vice-chair, secretary or recorder, program planner, and so on. Each of those roles has rights and duties, and the roles are consciously performed (Hare, 1994). Accepting or taking on the responsibility of such a role, however, does not ensure that the task and interaction responsibilities of the role will be enacted effectively. For example, Arliss may agree to be the group's leader after much prodding from other group members. But if Arliss places more importance on other activities and misses group meetings, she is not engaging in the leadership role. At times like these, informal roles emerge to substitute for missing or ineffective formal group roles.

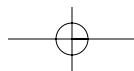


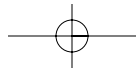


Usually, group members communicate in both formal and informal roles. In the top drawing, Saundra is the work team's formal leader. When she represents the team, she dresses more professionally to indicate her formal role status. When she interacts with members of the work team (bottom drawing), her leadership role is more informal as she coordinates the team's activities. Making the transition from a formal to an informal role is not always easy. In this case, by relinquishing some of her formal leadership responsibilities, Saundra is encouraging other team members to take on task responsibilities for the team.



While formal roles are developing (or are not being fulfilled), informal roles emerge through group member interaction. For example, any group member can perform leadership duties for his or her group without being the formal leader. Thus, when Arliss misses a meeting and does not notify other group members, Concha emerges as the group's informal leader. Other group members respond favorably when she gets them organized and focused on the group's task. Informal roles do not always emulate the formal roles of a group. For instance, someone who is good at keeping the group on track by asking questions has developed an informal role for which there is no formal equivalent. After all, we do not elect "back-on-trackers." As formal and informal interaction roles develop, a group further develops and defines its system of interaction, or its structure.





Formal Roles

There are several ways a group can acquire its formal role structure. **Formal roles** are those roles or offices that a group must have to get its work done. Sometimes roles are appointed, as when the mayor appoints a task force to explore opportunities for developing summer jobs for low-income high school students. And when she appoints members to the task force, she may appoint a chairperson or leader of the group. Groups can also elect members to formal roles. Most of the clubs and organizations on your campus use this procedure for filling formal group roles.

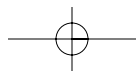
Alternately, groups allow roles to emerge from the group's interaction. Thus the member who is most dominant and who attempts to direct the group's activity becomes the leader; the member who takes notes without being asked becomes the group's secretary. Groups are often happy that members want these responsibilities. When someone adopts a role and then accepts implicit confirmation for that role from group members, it saves the group from having to hold an election. However, it may not be obvious to all group members exactly who the leader is. As you might guess, role emergence is not the most effective way for groups to identify their formal role structure. If your group chooses to allow formal roles to emerge, encourage members to discuss role responsibilities to avoid confusion.

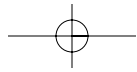
How the group structure is formed can be as important as the structure itself. Formal groups of all types, and especially decision-making or problem-solving groups, can benefit from carefully considering at least three formal roles. Although the role profiles and titles may be unique for each group, the roles of leader, secretary/recorder, and critical advisor are three central roles that can help groups stay focused on their goal or task.

First, many groups need a **leader**—someone to plan for and facilitate meetings, encourage and motivate group members, and be the group's link to its external environment. Even though leaders are required for most groups, students placed in small groups with their peers often simply wait for a leader to emerge. This enables motivated, enthusiastic members to make a claim for leadership by demonstrating their worth to the group. Group members who allow this to happen may want to avoid the humiliation of an election defeat or the high profile or responsibilities of leadership. But sometimes a leader does not emerge until it is too late. When this happens, the group gets behind in its task and can even find itself in a crisis because no one has laid the foundation for the group's work.

In groups in which a natural hierarchy exists (for example, in length of service in the group or in the quality of skills), the highest-ranking person often takes on the leadership role. Although it may seem natural, this norm does not guarantee that this group member will be the most effective leader. Moreover, such a norm does not encourage other members to develop leadership skills.

Sometimes group members assume that several people can share the leadership role. However, when leadership is shared, responsibility for achieving the group's task may be so diffused that the group finds it difficult to move ahead. If one member of the group does not perform the minimal leadership duties of set-





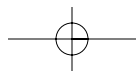
ting time deadlines, encouraging a sense of responsibility and accountability among members, and establishing group agendas, there is a greater likelihood that the group will fall apart. When group leadership is shared, it is recommended that co-leaders take on distinct role responsibilities and that other group members determine who is responsible for what. (Because the leadership role is so important, we will explore it in more detail in Chapter 10.)

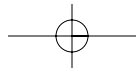
A second formal role that should be considered for each group is **secretary/recorder**. Groups that meet over time (particularly decision-making or problem-solving groups) need someone who is formally charged with keeping a record of what happens in the group's interaction. The secretary/recorder can also make a list of who is responsible for what assignments and create an agenda for the next group meeting. It is also a good idea for the secretary/recorder to review his or her notes with the group at the end of the meeting. That way, differences in perception can be checked, and all group members can reach agreement. Having a history of its action can help the group avoid repeating mistakes or wasting time.

A third formal role is that of **critical advisor**—also known as the devil's advocate. However, "critical advisor" is preferable to "devil's advocate" because of the negative connotations of the latter. The task of the critical advisor is to constructively criticize ideas brought before the group. Evaluating ideas in a tactful manner creates an environment in which other group members feel free to join in the constructive evaluation. Group members who are talkative and enthusiastic about the group's task often want to take on this role. But allowing one individual to dominate this role may cause that group member to be perceived as troublesome or negative. Also, concentrating the functions of this role in one person relieves other group members from any responsibility for critically examining the process or actions of the group.

A better way to establish the function of the critical advisor role is to formally assign the role of rotating it among members on a regular basis. Then, when someone constructively criticizes an idea before the group, other group members are more likely to attribute the criticism to the formal role the person is enacting, and not to any negativity in that individual. The critical advisor can also help the group by reminding members to stay on course with the problem-solving or decision-making procedure they chose to use. Groups that use the critical advisor role make better decisions because they are less likely to use poor information processing, make faulty assumptions, or allow one group member to dominate the group's discussion (Schultz, Ketrow, & Urban, 1995).

Together, these three formal roles—leader, secretary/recorder, and critical advisor—provide a basic functional structure for your group. Your group might require other formal roles as well, such as parliamentarian or treasurer. In any case, if the group waits to see who emerges to fulfill these roles, it wastes time and might leave some roles unfilled. Thus group members should either assume responsibility for these roles or assign them. Imagine trying to play softball without knowing your assignment. The batter hits the ball, and everyone dashes to center field to get the ball, leaving the runner free to circle the bases. "Formal



 **SKILL BUILDER*****Formal Role Performance***

For your most recent group experience, think about how the formal leadership role was assigned or emerged. How effective was it for the group to structure the leadership role in this way? How effectively did you or another group member perform the leadership role? How did other group members respond to the leader? Based on that experience, identify three principles that will help you the next time you assume a formal leadership role or emerge as a group's formal leader.

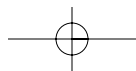
Role Performance” will help you recall the leadership roles you have fulfilled in the past.

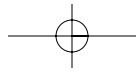
Informal Interaction Roles

In addition to formal roles, group members create **informal roles** as conversation becomes patterned and they repeatedly perform interaction functions for the group (Benne & Sheats, 1948; Mudrack & Farrell, 1995). Members are not elected to or assigned informal roles. Rather, informal roles are sanctioned by other group members through interaction.

Informal roles can develop in response to formal role assignments when the formal role structure does not provide for all the activities necessary for the group to be effective. They can also develop in opposition to the formal roles of the group (Homans, 1950). For example, if the formal leader is too dominant or too strict, a group member may develop an informal role that encourages social behavior to balance the leader's strict adherence to the rules. In other situations, roles develop and are accepted as group members gain a better understanding of the roles to be played. For example, Sheila tries to coordinate the activities of the members and provides information when it is requested. Because this behavior helps the group accomplish its task, she may become the group's informal leader. She can enhance her position in this role if she also talks about the characteristics of a good leader and includes the characteristics she is displaying. Thus she designates herself in an informal leadership role by behaving in a way that reinforces the role expectations of others.

Many informal roles emerge from how group members interact within the group. **Task roles** are those that function to move the group forward with its task or goal. **Group maintenance roles** help define the members' relationships and develop the group's climate. Whereas task and group maintenance roles help the group become more productive and cohesive, **individual roles** are typically counterproductive for the group, diverting attention from the group and its goal. Sometimes group members perform these behaviors consciously; other times they are oblivious to the impact of their behavior on the group. This type of group role framework is different from the formal roles just discussed in that any group member can aid or inhibit the group's interaction by stepping into these roles.



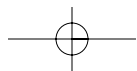


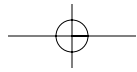
They also differ from formal roles in that informal roles tend to develop over time as the group interacts. Informal roles become established through repetition when other group members accept or encourage a group member's behavior (Bormann & Bormann, 1988).

Because these are informal interaction roles, they are contextually bound in terms of appropriateness and definition (Biddle, 1979). This means that a role that is appropriate in one group setting can be inappropriate in another. For example, the type of task role you exhibit in your work group probably will not be appreciated when your family is celebrating a holiday. You also should remember that roles are not always enacted similarly in different groups. For example, a group maintenance role in your circle of friends is likely to be enacted differently than a group maintenance role in your community action group. With your friends, maintenance roles are likely to be more personal because you know these individuals so intimately. In your community group, maintenance roles focus more on the professional relationships that exist among group members. Finally, you should recognize that not all roles will be evident or needed in all groups. The type of group task or activity and the relationship histories among group members will have a great deal to do with which roles develop. The specific roles (Benne & Sheats, 1948) in each category are described below:

Task Roles

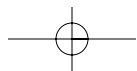
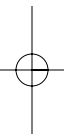
<i>Coordinator</i>	Pulls together related ideas or suggestions; clarifies the relationships between various ideas or suggestions; tries to coordinate the activities of various members or subgroups
<i>Elaborator</i>	Expands on suggestions; offers a rationale for suggestions previously made; tries to figure out how an idea or suggestion will work if adopted by the group
<i>Energizer</i>	Tries to prod the group into action or to a decision; attempts to stimulate or arouse the group to greater or higher-quality activity
<i>Evaluator/critic</i>	Gives a critical analysis of a suggestion or idea; evaluates or questions the practicality, logic, or facts of a suggestion; holds the group to a standard of accomplishment
<i>Information giver</i>	Offers facts or opinions; relates his or her own experience directly to the group task or problem
<i>Information seeker</i>	Asks for facts, opinions, or interpretations; seeks clarification of suggestions made
<i>Initiator/contributor</i>	Proposes tasks, goals, or actions; suggests solutions, procedures, or ways of handling difficulties; helps to organize the group
<i>Opinion giver</i>	States beliefs or opinions pertinent to a suggestion made or to alternative suggestions; emphasizes what should

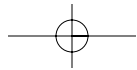




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	become the group's view of pertinent values, not primarily relevant factors or information
<i>Opinion seeker</i>	Asks for a clarification of the values pertinent to what the group is undertaking, rather than primarily the facts of the case; considers values involved in a suggestion or in alternative suggestions
<i>Orienter/clarifier</i>	Defines the position of a group with respect to its goals by summarizing what has occurred; points to departures from agreed-on directions or goals; raises questions about the direction that the group discussion is taking
<i>Procedural technician</i>	Does things for the group; performs routine tasks such as distributing materials, taking notes, typing, and photocopying
<i>Recorder</i>	Writes down suggestions, records group decisions, or notes the product of discussion; provides group memory
Maintenance Roles	
<i>Compromiser</i>	Tries to offer a compromise among conflicting ideas or positions (for example, by yielding status, admitting error, maintaining harmony, or meeting the group halfway)
<i>Encourager</i>	Praises, agrees with, and accepts the contributions of others; acts friendly, warm, and responsive to others; offers praise and acceptance of other points of view, ideas, and suggestions
<i>Follower</i>	Passively goes along with the ideas of others; serves as an audience in group discussions and decision making
<i>Gatekeeper/expediter</i>	Attempts to keep communication channels open; encourages the participation of others; tries to make sure that all group members have the chance to participate
<i>Harmonizer</i>	Attempts to reconcile disagreements among group members; reduces tension; gets people to explore differences
<i>Observer/commentator</i>	Comments on and interprets the group's internal process
<i>Standard setter/ ego ideal</i>	Expresses standards for the group to achieve or applies standards in evaluating the quality of group processes
Individual Roles	
<i>Aggressor</i>	Expresses disapproval of the acts, values, or feelings of others; attacks the group or the group's problem; shows envy toward another's contribution or tries to take credit for it; jokes aggressively



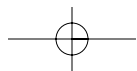


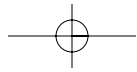
<i>Blocker</i>	Tends to be negative; resists the direction in which the group is headed; tends to disagree and oppose beyond reason; attempts to bring back an issue the group has bypassed or rejected
<i>Dominator</i>	Tries to assert authority or superiority and to manipulate the group or certain group members (for example, through flattering members, giving directions authoritatively, or interrupting the contributions of others)
<i>Evader/ self-confessor</i>	Uses the audience that the group setting provides to express personal interests, feelings, or opinions unrelated to the group's purposes; stays off the subject to avoid commitment
<i>Help seeker</i>	Attempts to call forth sympathetic responses from other group members by expressing insecurity, personal confusion, or self-deprecation
<i>Player</i>	Displays a lack of involvement in the group's processes (for example, through cynicism, nonchalance, or horseplay)
<i>Recognition seeker</i>	Works to call attention to self (for example, through boasting, referring to personal achievements, or acting in unusual or inappropriate ways)
<i>Special interest pleader</i>	Speaks for those with low status in the group, usually cloaking any prejudices or biases in the stereotype that best fits individual needs

As you read through the list, you likely recognized that you have enacted several of these roles. You may have assumed one set of roles in one group and a different set in another. And when a group met over a long period—say, several months—you may have favored one type of role early on and another role as time passed.

Group effectiveness depends on how complementary members' roles are to one another. Too many members in task roles or in maintenance roles will create an imbalance in the group. Although research has demonstrated that task role behavior is seen as most valuable by other group members (Mudrack & Farrell, 1995), a lack of members in group maintenance roles is likely to diminish effective work relationships within teams. Not only do formal roles need to be balanced with informal roles, but there must be a within-group balance of both formal and informal role structures.

There are several important issues to remember about group roles. First, group members perform roles in both the group's formal and informal role structures. When you assess your role effectiveness in a group, do not forget to examine which roles you play in both structures. You might also want to assess how congruent your formal role is with your informal role. For example, if you have been assigned the formal role of recorder and have also assumed the informal role of joker, other group members may not trust your abilities to help keep the group focused and on track. Make sure that your informal role is not sabotaging your formal group role.

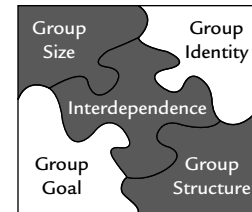




PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

Group Structure, Interdependence, and Group Size

Identify a recent group activity in which there was a specific task or goal. Think about how the roles played by group members provided structure for the group. How did you know that all necessary roles were fulfilled? Did the formal and informal roles fit together comfortably and effectively? How did role behavior affect the interdependence among group members? How did the size of the group affect role development? Were enough formal roles needed by the group so that each member could contribute to the group's formal role structure? If not, what informal roles did these members develop? If there were not enough members to fill all the formal roles, what happened?

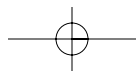


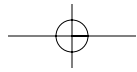
Second, there will likely be competition for roles. For instance, members frequently compete for the formal role of leader. When this happens, a member may perform task and procedural functions as an informal leader for the group until the formal leadership role is settled. Or the role may go unfilled, resulting in an unproductive group. When there is too much competition for group roles, the group can be sidetracked and lose sight of its goal. Try “Group Structure, Interdependence, and Group Size” for some practice in analyzing group roles. Once established, formal and informal roles often become fixed or accepted by other group members. When group members come to expect that certain people will continue to effectively (or ineffectively) play certain roles, norms have been created.

Group Norms

We all bring a set of norms to our group experiences. A **norm** is an expectation about behavior, an informal rule adopted by a group to regulate group members' behavior (Feldman, 1984). Norms can be developed from past experiences, from the expectations of others, or from interaction with others in unique settings. Norms shape your beliefs and attitudes about what will happen and even how you might respond in certain interaction situations. But, most importantly, norms provide clues about the appropriateness of your behavior in group settings (Jackson, 1965). You probably have developed norms about how groups should complete their tasks and activities (for example, you prefer that your group use voting as a technique to give all members a voice). You also have developed social norms (you expect group members to talk about themselves and what is going on in their lives before getting down to the group's business). Try “Identifying Your Group Expectations,” on pages 54 and 55, to see what norms you might bring to a new group situation.

It is unlikely that you have said to other group members, “You know, we have a norm about that.” But you have probably identified or talked about customs,





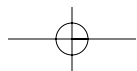
traditions, standards, rules, or values that are practiced in your groups. These are synonyms for norms, and when they exist, they guide your behavior by telling you what is appropriate and acceptable in group settings. Whatever norms you believe in, they are the least visible yet most powerful form of social control that can be exerted in a group (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985). The closer group members feel to one another and the greater the number of communication linkages among group members, the more powerful norms are in influencing group members' behavior (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1968).

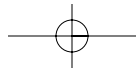
Norm Development

Norms can develop in a variety of ways. A norm can be brought into a group from other experiences of group members. Think of this as a script—or a sequence of activities to follow—that a group member used in a previous group experience. For example, in her musical group, Jasmine suggests that someone should be responsible for calling each performer before the next group rehearsal to remind them of when they will be meeting and what music they will be practicing. This was done regularly in Jasmine's musical group at her previous school, and she thought it was really helpful. If Jasmine offers to be the group member to call and remind others, the norm has a chance to develop and take hold in this group. And if the norm helps the group rehearse more effectively, then other group members may offer to take on this responsibility. However, if group members find the reminder call annoying or if Jasmine calls them too late for the call to be beneficial, the group may fail to adopt this norm.

Norms can also develop in reaction to some unique event in a group. In this case, group members implicitly compare their reactions to the event. If their reactions or interpretations are dissimilar, group members must develop a group-based understanding of the novel situation (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985). This group-based understanding becomes the group norm. Suppose that Zeb, Caitlin, and Dorothy belong to an honors fraternity on campus. To help the organization reach its goal of collecting 1,000 children's books, Zeb, Caitlin, and Dorothy meet to discuss strategies for getting merchants to donate or purchase books. During their meeting in the lobby of a campus building, a man approaches the group, identifies himself as Professor Darwin, and says, "If you'll let me know where to drop them off, I'll give you ten books." The threesome's immediate reaction is "Great!" As they continue to talk, however, they realize that no one knows who Professor Darwin is or why he offered to donate the books. Caitlin says that he must have overheard them talking. Zeb suggests that some other honors student must have told Professor Darwin about the book drive. Dorothy's not sure what to think, but she says, "If Professor Darwin is willing to donate ten books, wouldn't other professors do the same thing?"

The group immediately shifts its focus to ways of approaching professors for book donations. The building's directory lists twenty-one professors, so they divide up the list and start knocking on professors' office doors. When they meet back in the lobby, they find that together they have secured pledges from thirteen



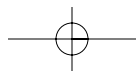
**EVALUATING GROUP SUCCESS***Identifying Your Group Expectations*

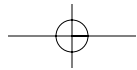
Your success in a group is somewhat dependent on the expectations you have about that group. Think about the next group interaction you expect to have. This can be any type of group—a school group, work group, community group, and so on. How likely is the group you have identified to have the attributes listed below?

1 = not likely at all 2 = unsure 3 = very likely

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Some group members will do too much whereas others will do too little. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. There will be greater input because we will work as a group. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. There will be scheduling conflicts. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. I will get to know more about other people. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. There will be difficult group members to deal with. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. There will be greater objectivity about the problems or issues the group is considering. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. Different people in the group will use different methods to solve problems or make decisions. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. I will be able to learn “people” skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. It will be hard to get all group members to agree. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10. We can specialize; each group member will get to use his or her own talents. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11. Not all group members will have the same sense of purpose. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 12. Group members will brainstorm with one another. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13. Some group members will move at a different pace than I do. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 14. I will get to meet other people. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 15. I will have to rely on others in the group. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 16. There will be more resources because many people are involved. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 17. The group will get the credit instead of the individual who did the most or the best work. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 18. I will get feedback on my ideas. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 19. Some people will be shy around others. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

professors for ten books each. The group is excited about its success, and Zeb suggests that the group meet the next afternoon in the neighboring building to try the same approach. The group is developing a norm about how to complete its task. Something happened (Professor Darwin’s offer to donate books) that was unexpected. When group members discussed this unique turn of events, their interpretations for why he offered to donate books were dissimilar. But now that the group has achieved some success toward its goal, the members explicitly agree to try the approach again. Thus a pattern emerges in their behavior, and they accept it as a norm because they believe it is effective.



*continued*

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 20. The group's interaction will break the monotony. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 21. Some group members will not be in the mood to work in a group. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 22. I will be able to understand different points of view. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 23. This group will be compared to other groups. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 24. Others' strengths will complement my weaknesses. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 25. Some group members will not show up. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 26. I will learn how to work as a team member. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 27. I will have to play catch-up when a group member does not show up or does not do his or her part. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 28. There will be the chance to network with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Count the number of even-numbered items you marked as 3 for "very likely": _____.

This is your positive group attribute score.

Count the number of odd-numbered items marked as 3 for "very likely": _____.

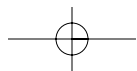
This is your negative attribute score.

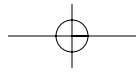
For any characteristic or attribute you indicated would very likely occur, you are importing a norm into the group through your interaction expectations. The even-numbered items are positive group attributes; the odd-numbered items are negative group attributes. For example, if you said that it was very likely that you would get feedback on your ideas (item 18), you will look forward to such feedback and accept it when given. You will probably also give feedback to others. Giving and receiving feedback is critical to group success. By bringing that particular norm to the group, you can facilitate the group's acceptance of positive group interaction processes.

In contrast, if you marked "very likely" more often on negative than positive group attributes, you may be bringing a poor attitude into the group. Not only will you have to overcome this negativity, but others in the group will have to as well. Your group may have to spend more time on building and developing relationships, and on identifying and maintaining positive interaction techniques, than on working on the task or issue at hand.

Source: Adapted from Keyton, Harmon, and Frey (1996).

Norms also develop when one member's behavior deviates from what is typical within the group. Even when group members have not explicitly talked about what they expect from one another, one person's behavior can be at odds with how other members believe they should behave. When this happens, members feel as if a norm has been violated. Let's return to Zeb, Caitlin, and Dorothy. Approaching professors for book donations has turned out to be so successful that the group has dropped its idea of approaching local merchants. For the last four days, the threesome has met after classes to solicit books from professors. But today, when Dorothy meets Zeb and Caitlin, she is dressed in her exercise clothes,



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her skin is damp with perspiration, her face is flushed, and her hair is a mess. Sensing Zeb and Caitlin's disappointment, Dorothy explains that her afternoon class was cancelled and so she took the opportunity to get in a workout at the gym. The group has never talked about being dressed a certain way when approaching professors, and Dorothy simply assumes that it will not make a difference. But Zeb and Caitlin clearly are distressed. Without having to address the issue directly, Dorothy concedes, "Okay guys, I won't do it again." Without knowing it, the group has developed and accepted a dress norm when approaching professors to donate books.

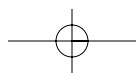
In this case, Dorothy challenged the norm. But the group could have had one of three reactions. First, the other members could have ignored Dorothy's appearance. This could have undermined the norm, encouraging members to dress however they wanted, or it could have deepened the conflict between Dorothy and the other group members. Second, Dorothy's appearance could have prompted the group to talk about how to dress. After some discussion, members could have agreed that it did not really matter, that professors were accustomed to seeing students in a variety of attire. Third, the group could have perceived Dorothy's appearance as a real threat to the norm, reinforcing its belief in the norm. This third reaction is what happened with the group.

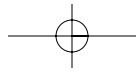
If you see that a norm is needed in your group, you can use your communication skills in several ways to initiate the norm (Feldman, 1984). First, if you are the leader or a high-status member, you can talk explicitly about the desired behavior. This strategy is particularly useful for establishing procedural norms, such as setting standards for how and when the group meets. Second, you can help initiate a norm after a critical event in the group's history. For instance, after a particularly good or bad experience, you can comment on the effect of what just happened and urge other members to continue or to cease that behavior.

A third way to establish a norm is to control the initial interactions of the group. If you use yourself as a model, you establish expectations for other group members' behavior. For example, Gwen wants to make sure that the Citizens Police Review Board, to which she has just been appointed, develops a professional, nonpartisan voice. To help ensure this, before her first meeting, she writes down a list of issues and then examines each one from the viewpoint of a variety of community groups. When one of these issues is raised at the meeting, Gwen is able to interject viewpoints other than her own. Seeing her level of preparedness and her ability to be inclusive, other board members are less politicized in their contributions. Practice creating a norm with "How Can You Initiate a Norm?"

Why Talk About Norms?

A norm of many groups is tardiness for scheduled meetings. If the group does not confront the tardiness of a particular group member, the implication for all group members is that it is acceptable to arrive late. Soon, members expect everyone to be late, which makes tardiness an acceptable standard. Thus, it is important to discuss group norms to avoid destructive behavior and ambiguity. Although most




 **SKILL BUILDER**

How Can You Initiate a Norm?

Think about one of your current social groups. The next time you meet, try to introduce a new norm into the group. What norm might you like to introduce (for example, giving each other presents on birthdays and at holidays, or getting the group to make faster decisions in planning movie outings)? How will you go about initiating that norm? How do you believe other members will react? What will you do if you meet resistance to the norm?

people are hesitant to do so, group members should spend some of their first meeting time talking about how the group will operate. Explicitly stating rules of conduct for group interactions can help groups avoid two problems: (1) the difficulty of confronting a member whose behavior is detrimental to the group, and (2) the development of destructive group cycles.

Moving from implied or informal norms to explicit or formal norms is more difficult than people realize. To do so requires conscious attention to the rules and procedures that group members are willing to adopt. The more such rules and procedures are discussed, the more likely all group members are to feel that they have had a part in their development, and thus the more likely they are to adhere to them.

When the behavior becomes part of the accepted routine, the norm is implied and usually left unexamined until someone severely violates it. For instance, a lack of preparation, like tardiness, is a common behavior that group members tolerate and allow to become a norm. Take a look at transcripts from the meetings of one student group preparing a class project. To what degree is the pattern that develops in the example familiar to you?

First Meeting

BOB: Sorry, I didn't have time to work on this last night.

KERRY: Okay, man. I understand.

PENNY: Yeah, we understand.

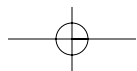
BOB: Next time, I promise, I'll get it done before I work on anything else.

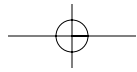
Second Meeting

KERRY: You know, guys, I was supposed to do the budget. I'm sorry, I didn't get it done.

PENNY: Oh, okay.

BOB: It's okay, man, I messed up last time.





Third Meeting

PENNY: I'm sorry, guys. I didn't get your things until late, and I just ran out of time. Sorry.

BOB: Yeah, we're sorry, too. Next meeting, though, we'll get it all together.

KERRY: Don't worry Penny. We'll get it done.

Fourth Meeting

BOB: Who got their part done? Sorry, but I didn't.

PENNY: Not me. I had to work late last night. Kerry?

KERRY: Not me, either. Sorry about that.

PENNY: Now what do we do?

Communication Networks

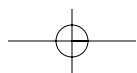
The norms established in a group and the roles that members take on create another type of structure for the group—its **communication network**, or a structure of who talks to whom. A communication network is the interaction pattern or flow of messages between and among group members. A network creates structure for the group because the network controls who can (or will) talk to whom. A network also reinforces social norms in the group. Each group develops its own unique communication network, but two general types—decentralized and centralized—can be identified.

Communication networks can be developed based on the interpersonal relationships among group members or on the type of group task or activity. For example, you are more likely to talk frequently with your next-door neighbor in your neighborhood watch group than with your neighbor down the street. You and your next-door neighbor might share similar concerns about the burned-out street lamp, which reinforces the need for you to communicate with each other. At neighborhood meetings, you will probably sit next to your neighbor, and when adequate lighting is discussed, the two of you can jointly describe the problem and raise concerns.

Group activities also can dictate who talks to whom in a group. If you are the catcher for your softball team, you will talk to the pitcher and infielders more frequently than you will talk to the outfielders. By virtue of your position on the team, you must talk to the pitcher to plan your approach to opposing batters and to the infielders to coordinate your team's defense.

Decentralized Networks

Most groups use a decentralized network that allows each group member to talk to every other group member (see Figure 3.1). This pattern is **decentralized** because group members communicate without restrictions, and it is typical of most group



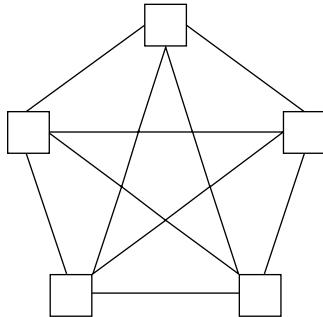
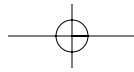


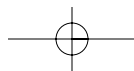
Figure 3.1 *Decentralized Networks*

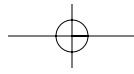
interactions. Although this is the best communication network to use for group discussions, problem solving, and decision making, it may slow down other types of group activities. Imagine having to talk to everyone in the group to get approval before completing a simple task that has been assigned to you. An open, or decentralized, network provides the most input, but it can also produce **communication overload**—too much or too complex communication from too many sources. When overload occurs, messages may compete or conflict, causing stress and confusion. Even in discussions, groups using an open network need a facilitator or coordinator to monitor turn taking so that everyone has a chance to be heard.

Centralized Networks

Any type of network that imposes restrictions on who can talk to whom and for which one or two group members control those restrictions is **centralized** (see Figure 3.2). As a result, some members may experience **communication underload**—too infrequent or too simple messages. Group members in an underload situation often feel disconnected from the group. A centralized network can develop if one group member acts as the controller of messages, passing out information to other group members. From this central and controlling position, the member in the role of leader talks to other group members individually. Group members do not talk with one another; they communicate only with the leader. This type of pattern often develops when there is a strong, domineering leader. If this is the only communication pattern within the group, group members are likely to be dissatisfied with the group experience. This pattern also restricts the development of a group identity and weakens the interdependence of group members.

The most centralized of all communication patterns is the linear chain. In this network, one person starts a message and asks that the message be relayed to another group member. This continues until all group members receive the message. This can be an efficient pattern for groups that need to pass along simple information. But it can also produce confusion and ambiguity. Messages that are relayed from one person to the next often become less specific. Unfortunately, it is difficult to know when details are lost along the chain because the last person to receive the message does not check with the initiator of the message.





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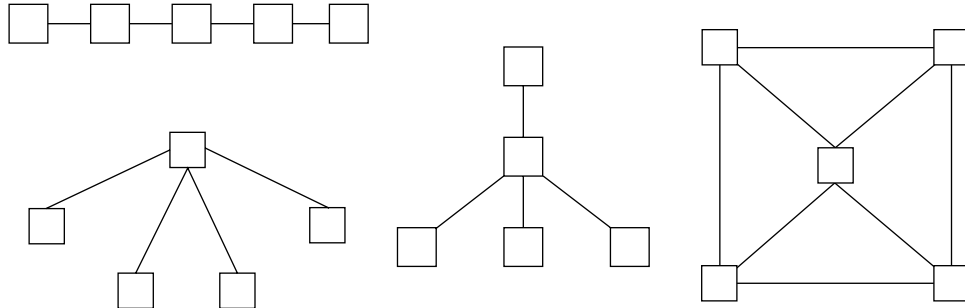


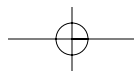
Figure 3.2 *Centralized Networks*

Identifying Your Group's Network

Unless communication among group members is severely restricted or controlled, you are likely to see patterns similar to each of the networks at some time in your group. Most groups think they use a decentralized or open network in which group members are free to talk to whomever they want. But roles and norms that develop in groups affect who talks to whom and who talks most frequently. Status and power differences among members also affect a group's communication network. As a result some group members will end up talking more, some will be talked to less, and some will talk only to specific other members.

Do not assume that where individuals sit during a group meeting accurately reflects the communication network being used. You can make a simple diagram of the group and then track the flow of communication to discover which network your group uses, as in Figure 3.3. First, identify exactly where people sit around the table or in the meeting space. When one group member (say, Wallace) talks to another (say, Marie), draw a line indicating that communication link, and mark the link with an arrowhead to indicate the direction of the conversation. Each additional time Wallace talks to Marie, make a dash across the line. As Figure 3.3 shows, Wallace talked to Marie four times (one arrow and three dashes). Notice, too, that two arrows can link group members. Thus Bren directs messages to Sandra, and Sandra responds to Bren. Also, Aku talks to Bren, but Bren is either ignoring her or directing responses to her inquiries to other group members or to the group as a whole. Sometimes group members make statements or ask questions to the entire group. Indicate this type of interaction with a link to "group." For example, notice that Bren made comments to the group as a whole five times.

What can this kind of diagram tell you about a group's structure? First, it tells you that the distribution of conversation in the group is unequal. More members talk to Bren and Sandra than anyone else, Wallace and Marie talk to others more frequently, and Bren directs the most comments to the group as a whole. The diagram also indicates that Bren, Sandra, Wallace, and Marie have formed a subgroup separate from the subgroup of Aku and Donnie, and that Donnie talks only to Aku.



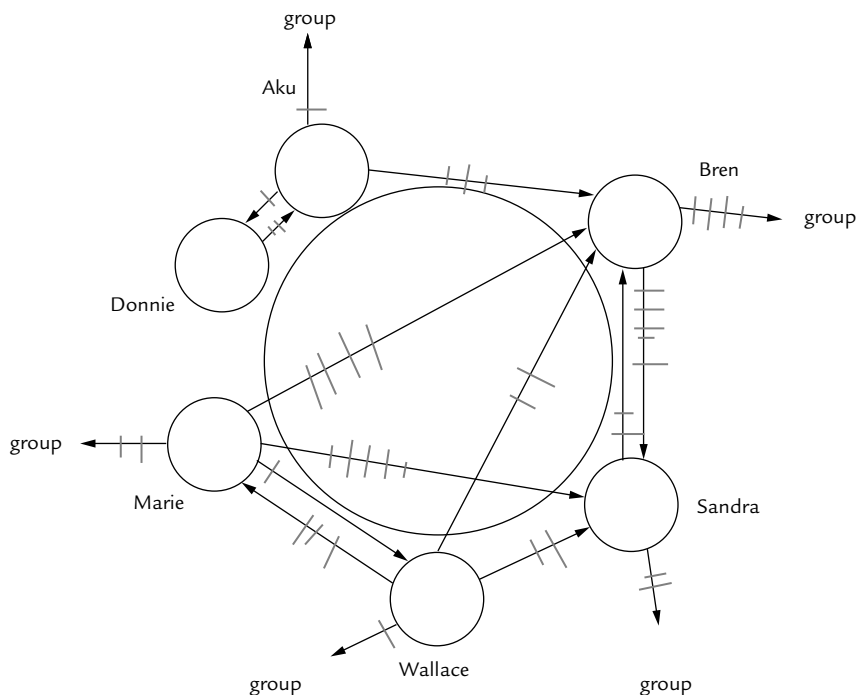
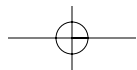


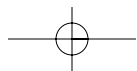
Figure 3.3 *Diagramming Communication in a Group*

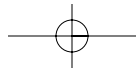
Determining Which Network to Use

Which network should your group use? This depends on several factors. Although the task or activity of the group is often the primary determinant (Hirokawa, Erbort, & Hurst, 1996), do not forget about the effects of a communication network on a group's social or relational development. On the one hand, centralized networks place a heavy burden on the person at the center of the network. At the same time, a centralized pattern limits the opportunity for group members to get to know one another, to develop relationships within the group setting, and to create a group identity.

On the other hand, decentralized, open communication networks may slow the group's work on the task. Yet members communicating in this fashion are generally more satisfied with the group and its activity and are more committed to the group. You can ask yourself these questions to determine which communication network will work best for your group situation:

1. What is more important to the group right now—working on this task or developing relationships and commitment to the group?
2. How difficult is the task? Is it simple or complex?
3. To what extent do all group members need to develop leadership and followership skills? Or are roles and functions specifically set in this group?





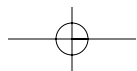
Membership Changes In Groups

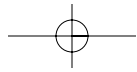
You might assume that group membership is fairly stable, that most group members remain in the group throughout the group's history. But this is not always the case. Some groups, like nursing units in hospitals, have high turnover rates. As a result, group members may face ambiguity adjusting to new personalities and to changes in how members take on roles in the group. Sometimes membership changes are temporary, as when a nurse takes a 2-week vacation and is replaced by a nurse who floats among assignments at the hospital. At other times, membership changes are permanent. Members may leave the group when they quit or retire from the organization or transfer to other units. Also, members may simply grow tired of the group and drop out. Each of these membership changes are member initiated.

Membership change in groups can be critical because a change in the composition of the group also changes the cluster of knowledge, skills, and abilities within the group (McGrath, Berdahl, & Arrow, 1995). Let's explore some of the issues surrounding membership change to assess its impact on groups (Arrow & McGrath, 1993). First, when membership change increases or decreases the number of members in the group, other aspects of the group—group roles, norms, and communication networks—must change as well.

For example, Kara's honors study group meets with its honors advisor to work on a research project. For over a year, the group—the professor and four students—has met in the professor's office. After much discussion about whether to add other students, the group decides that adding one more student will help lighten the workload of running the experiments. Unfortunately, the group does not think about how an additional group member will affect the group's meetings. The professor's office is crowded with stacks of books and computer printouts. There is a couch that can seat only three people, as well as a visitor's chair, and the professor's chair. When the group with its new member gathers to meet for the first time, someone has to sit on the floor. This seating arrangement creates awkward dynamics among group members and impedes the group's ability to work together on coding data. Certainly, the group could move to a new meeting location, but that would cause another disruption in the group. Although adding a member seems to be a gain for the group because it will lighten the workload, it also creates an unexpected negative consequence.

Second, it is important to know why there is a change in group membership. Group members react differently to situations in which membership change is member initiated, and not controlled by someone outside the group. You are more likely to accept a new member who persuades you to let her join than a member who joins because your boss says she must. Sometimes groups actually recruit new members because they need skills other group members lack. Does a group ever purposely change members? Yes. Sometimes a group member creates a logjam, making it difficult for the group to accomplish anything (Cohen, 1990). Groups can get stuck when strong, self-oriented individuals are in the leadership role, and groups can fail to meet their potential if there is a weak link. Changes to replace ineffective members are made deliberately to help the group out of its





entrenched patterns. We expect professional sports teams to use this strategy, and we should want our groups to do the same.

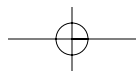
The timing of a change in group membership is also important. Most of you expect that your membership in classroom groups will remain stable throughout the term or the course. What will happen to your group and how will you respond if 3 weeks after your group forms, your instructor adds a student to your group? Making changes after your group has formed and while members are developing a group identity and structure likely will disrupt your group.

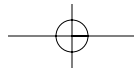
The frequency with which groups change membership also reflects on the stability of the group, on the group's ability to chart a course for itself, or on the group's leadership. For example, an executive group that cannot hold any person in the position of administrative assistant for longer than 6 months makes you wonder more about the executive group and less about the individuals rotating through the administrative role. Groups that have regular turnover like this are often questioned about members' ability to work together. The assumption is that their inability to do so effectively drives off the administrative assistants. Questions about the group's ability to function legally and ethically are also raised. Do the administrative assistants leave because they are unwilling to participate in the group in the manner the executives wish? Regular changes in group membership affect our interpretation of the group and its performance.

Fourth, it is important to know which members are leaving, because group members are not necessarily interchangeable. A group that loses an effective leader upon whom other group members relied will experience disruption and frustration. Sometimes another group member can assume that role and take on new responsibilities; other times, however, the group has a hole that must be filled. For example, your relay swim team relies on the swimmer who can assess how the other teams are doing in relationship to your team and then really kick in for a quick finish. Thus, if you lose the member who normally swims in this position, your group has a hole to fill.

What is affected by changes in membership (Arrow & McGrath, 1993)? Obviously, membership dynamics will change. Any change in group membership will alter to some degree the interactions among group members. Not only does the structure and the process of the group change, but members' performance is also likely to be affected. The more interdependence among members of the team, the more the team will feel the effects of membership changes. And the more central the member is to the team, the more the team will feel the effects of the change.

Group members build a history together, and each group develops a memory of how and why it does certain things in certain ways. At the very minimum, a new group member will be unfamiliar with a group's habits and routines (Gersick & Hackman, 1990). These need to be explained, or the new group member will feel left out. And the new group member cannot share in the memory of the group—there is simply no way for the new group member to know what it feels like to be a part of this group (McGrath, Berdahl, & Arrow, 1995). Assumptions or old knowledge that other group members use in making decisions simply are not available or do not make sense to the new group member.





Also, there is no guarantee that current members will be able to make the behavioral adjustments needed when a new group member enters. However, a group can overcome these effects by realizing that membership change actually creates a new group. The group must allow members time to resocialize and to reidentify the role structure. The challenges of membership change are (1) to initiate the new members into the team, (2) to learn from the new member's fresh perspective, and (3) to not sacrifice the pace and focus of the team (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

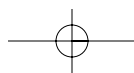
Group Member Socialization

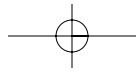
The roles, norms, and communication networks group members develop and use affect the long-term interactions of members by influencing how individuals negotiate their fit within a group. Whether all members or only one or two are new to the group, roles, norms, and networks are the reciprocal processes by which newcomers and other group members adjust and adapt to one another. Known as **group socialization** (Anderson, Riddle, & Martin, 1999), these adjustments and adaptations take place anytime a new member joins a group. Group socialization is an ongoing process, but it becomes especially salient to group members anytime an established group finds itself creating or re-creating itself or its activities.

Obviously, group members do not join a group as a blank slate. Individuals bring knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about group work with them, just as they bring their own motivations for joining the group and their own sets of communication skills. The socialization process really commences as an individual begins to anticipate what it will be like to be a member of a particular group. For example, you are thrilled that you were selected to be a member of your university's ambassador team but also a little concerned about how you will blend in with students who have already served on this team for several years. And even as you are anticipating joining the team, the existing team members also have anticipatory expectations about you. They might be wondering if you'll be able to devote the time these group activities demand. They might also be hoping that you'll live up to the performance level you claimed you could achieve in the interview.

The first day you meet with the ambassador team, you and the other members begin to adjust to one another, and to negotiate the formal and informal roles, norms, and communication networks of the group. There are many ways to introduce yourself to other group members. If you get there early, you can greet the other members as they arrive. Always be sure to introduce yourself to anyone you do not know well. When you do this, you help establish a friendly and supportive climate and create a sense of openness to which others will respond.

At your first meeting and in subsequent encounters with other group members, you need to continue to assimilate yourself into the group. One way to get to know others is to sit next to someone you do not know at all or do not know well. You can start a conversation by bringing up an easy topic (weekend activities, hobbies, your role in this organization). The objective here is to create an opportunity for interaction that will help you get to know the other person. But





the topic of conversation should not be threatening or invasive. In fact, if you ask strangers if they have met their quarterly goals, you will be perceived as creating distance rather than closeness in the relationship.

Now, as a member of the team, you are influencing the group, just as the group and its other members are influencing you. You are fully integrated, or assimilated, into the group culture when you and the other team members establish a shared group identity by working effectively and interdependently within the group's structures toward a common group goal.

Of course, current members should also help to welcome and socialize new members into a group. During a meeting, you can assimilate new group members by asking them to comment on what the group is talking about ("Mary, what do you think of this plan?"). This is especially important because as new members they may believe that their opinions are not welcomed, given that they have little or no history with the group.

How Groups Develop

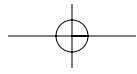
Earlier, we said that no two groups are alike. Not only are groups not alike, but it is unlikely that any two groups will develop or structure themselves in exactly the same way. We can examine a group's structure by looking at its development over time. The phases of group development have been described as a linear process, with the underlying assumption that all groups develop through each stage in similar fashion. However, that assumption has been challenged (Cissna, 1984).

We'll describe each of the phases of group development as you might expect they would occur, but it is not necessary to think of a group developing in such a linear way. Some groups move steadily through each phase but do not spend equal time in each phase. Other groups may appear to be developing and then regress and repeat certain phases. After describing each of the phases, we'll explore why group development is not always linear.

Stages of Group Development

Generally, researchers identify five stages or phases of group development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and termination (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Wheelan & Hochberger, 1996; Wheelan & Kaeser, 1997). The communication within the group during each phase has distinct characteristics.

Forming When the group first comes together, members explore issues of inclusion and dependency. They ask themselves, "Will I be accepted by others in the group?" and "What will I have to do in this group?" Often group members express anxiety because they are unsure about their roles in this particular group or have concerns about how well the group will function. Because group members are focusing on "I" questions instead of "we" questions, the group has not really become a group yet. This first phase of group development is called **forming**. In

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this phase, almost all comments are directed toward the formal leader or toward the person group members perceive will become the leader. Members include comments that provide cues to their identity and status outside of the group because their connection to the group is not strong. There is little basis for trust at this stage because most members take a wait-and-see attitude. Usually, the discussion is superficial because the issues are tentatively addressed until members discover where others stand. And little effective listening occurs as group members try to establish who they are and what they will agree to do in this group. As you can see, in this stage, the group is new and its process is unfamiliar. Thus individuals may actually be confused as they try to frame this new group in terms of the experiences of their previous groups.

Let's see how one student project group working on recommendations for a revised professor evaluation system interacted in this phase:

CYD: Okay, I'm ready to get started. What do you want me to do?

PEARL: I want to work on the questions on the form. Is that okay?

TAL: (says nothing, looks down to avoid eye contact with others)

DARCY: If no one wants to be leader, I could . . .

CYD: Have you been leader of a group like this before? I haven't.

DARCY: Yes, I know what we need to do. I'm the president of the Student Honors Association and I'm vice-president of the Panhellenic Council. Anybody else want to be leader?

PEARL: Can I work with somebody on something since I'm new to campus?

CYD: I could introduce you around to my friends in my sorority.

PEARL: Thanks, let's talk after class; I belonged to Delta Delta Delta at my other university, but there's not a chapter here on this campus.

DARCY: Tal, do you have anything to say?

TAL: I've got another class after this one—a test; I need to study.

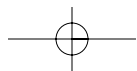
DARCY: (ignores his comment and continues) I suggest we brainstorm a list of issues that need discussion and then divide up the work before today's session is over. Agreed?

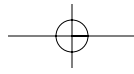
PEARL: What about the time frame for delivering results back to the students? Don't you think students should get feedback on how well the professors are doing?

DARCY: Okay, that's two issues: questions and time frame for feedback. Anything else?

TAL: (sits reading his chemistry textbook)

This group is in the initial stages of forming. Little trust is being demonstrated toward others in the group, and most comments are self-oriented, not group-oriented. Very quickly, the group allows Darcy to take on the leadership role.





From that point on, she dominates the conversation without including the less talkative Tal. Certainly, this group is moving in uncharted territory; the members have not developed a sense of “we-ness.” And at this point, there is no strong consensus about what the group’s task is or how it will proceed.

There are several things group members can do to help move the group through this initial stage (Wellins, Byham, & Wilson, 1991). First, group members should increase their one-to-one communication with one another. They should get to know other group members and be able to identify them by name. Second, the group should clarify its purpose by writing a charter or mission statement (see Chapter 12). In clarifying its purpose, group members will get to know one another while building commitment toward a larger unifying goal. Tension will increase if individuals sense conflict with other group members—especially conflict in reaction to the ambiguity of the group’s task. The key here is to relax, use a calm voice, and attempt to view activities from others’ points of view. It’s also important to participate in group meetings so that members can get to know one another. Sitting back and taking it all in will only increase the tension in this developmental stage.

Storming The second phase is typically a period of conflict, or **storming**, during which group members assert their individual preferences. Thus conflict occurs as part of the group’s natural development. As group members bring their talents, skills, and knowledge to the group, they may find themselves competing with one another for roles, for attention from other group members, and for status and power. Members may also feel internal conflict because they are being asked to handle tasks or activities that are new to them. And they may feel time pressures as they try to fit these new activities into their schedule.

Generally, participation by all members is high in this phase. As a result, conflicts arise, which further encourages members to use assertive and dominant styles. As group members express their positions on issues, subgroups and coalitions begin to form. Allegiances and feelings of commitment are stronger in the subgroups than in the group as a whole, which can dampen the cohesiveness of the group. Because of the natural outbreak of conflict in this stage, group members must pay attention to their conflict management skills. If a group cannot learn to manage its problems in this stage, it is unlikely to manage them well later on.

Let’s take a look at the professor evaluation group now:

DARCY: Okay, you presented your viewpoint, Pearl. Let’s move on!

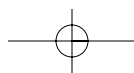
TAL: I don’t think I can agree with Pearl.

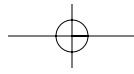
DARCY: No one can, Tal. Let’s move on!

CYD: What about the questions? Has anyone looked at the questions I’ve developed?

DARCY: We can’t deal with the questions just now, Cyd. We’ve got to figure out the time frame for reporting results back to professors.

TAL: Professors should get their own results first.



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PEARL: Why can't they go to the library and look them up like students have to do?

TAL: That's humiliating. Would you want to do that if you were a professor?

PEARL: I wouldn't mind.

TAL: I'm telling you they'll mind and turn down our proposal altogether!

DARCY: Ladies! Gentleman! I'm going to make an executive decision here.

Let's table all evaluative comments until we can agree on a time line.

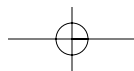
CYD: You know, Darcy, you're not always right.

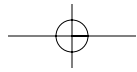
DARCY: But right enough to move us along. Okay, let's draw the time line on the board. . . .

This group is definitely storming. There is conflict over what task deserves the most attention, and there is conflict over Darcy's assumption of the leadership role. Members are not listening to one another because they are too focused on competing with one another. And it is not even clear that all members would agree that they are working on the same task.

How can a group move through the storming stage? There are both group and individual strategies that can help stabilize a group during this stage (Wellins, Byham, & Wilson, 1991). To maintain group unity following the conflicts that arise during this stage, group members should review their charter or goal statements. Knowing that there is an ultimate outcome or goal can help members more productively manage conflict. At each meeting, the group should review its performance in light of its implementation plan developed in the first stage. Storming can also be a stage of learning because when conflicts arise group members learn more about individual opinions and positions. Group members should try to manage their conflict through problem-solving or collaborative strategies (see Chapter 8). Getting members to agree to meeting management procedures (see Chapter 12) and helping group members see the value of feedback and observation (see Chapter 13) can help a group overcome problems encountered in this stage. In the storming stage, individual group members should become accomplished at leading and participating in meetings, as well as at supporting other members in their group roles. Doing so provides a sense of integration with other members and can decrease conflicts. Because many ideas will surface in this stage of group development, members should be open to diversity, valuing differences rather than rejecting them. Faith and patience are the keys to moving through storming to the third phase, norming.

Norming Once the conflicts are resolved, the group enters the third phase—**norming**—the phase in which members develop trust and come to accept one another. Now familiar with what their roles are and how the group will proceed with its activity, group members can openly negotiate differences while maintaining positive social relationships. The conflicts and diversity the group struggled with in the storming phase are now integrated effectively into the group. Group members feel as if “we're all in this together” (Wellins, Byham, & Wilson, 1991).





The group's communication structure becomes more flexible. Members are likely to report high levels of satisfaction with, cooperation in, and commitment to the group, and group members are able to laugh together (Moosbrucker, 1988). "We" is used more frequently than "I."

Let's see how our group has made the transition from storming to norming:

TAL: We've got a plan now. Good!

DARCY: Okay, let's review. We've decided on the time frame for returning feedback to professors and students. Cyd, tell us about how the revisions to the questions are coming along.

CYD: Well, of the thirty questions, we've made changes to about half. It really helped putting the questions on everyone's e-mail and having you send your comments back. That way I could synthesize everyone's ideas. I'll have a final version to show you next meeting. I'm meeting with the president of the faculty senate to get her input before I finish it all up. She said she would be glad to meet with us.

DARCY: Pearl, with the time line done, what's the next task you want to take on?

PEARL: As I review our original plan, there's only the computer coding to consider. I'd be happy to go see the analyst in Information Systems to discuss what we'd need.

DARCY: Thanks, Pearl. That would be great.

TAL: Can I help you, Pearl?

PEARL: How about meeting with me after I go to Information Systems? At that point, I'll need some help figuring out how to meet their guidelines.

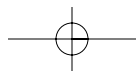
TAL: Sure!

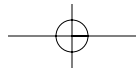
This certainly is a different group now. Personal and task conflicts are minimized and the group seems to be working effectively toward one goal that all members agree on. Members appear to be integrating their tasks and are open to sharing information with one another. If it maintains this type of communication, the group will likely finish its project on schedule and be able to take pride in its accomplishment.

But caution should be exercised at this stage. Just because the group is more cohesive at this stage does not mean that it can ignore its processes. Groups can become myopic—that is, their vision can narrow—during this stage. Because the group is working well, it can become vulnerable to making wrong choices.

Procedures that initially seemed overwhelming may now help the group be more productive (for example, using the standard agenda for decision making; see Chapter 8). This is also a good stage to introduce or continue feedback and observation. Now that the group is working well together, group members can use feedback information to make it work even better.

Performing The fourth phase, **performing**, is when the task activity of the group is accomplished. Now that both procedures and relationships have been



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developed and are stable, there is clarity and agreement on the group's goals. It is during this phase that the group works on its task or activity. Problem solving or decision making is more easily accomplished because group members promote and support open discussion and have expectations that they will be successful as a group. Trust among group members is also at its highest level. During this performance stage, group members are so tightly integrated with the team that they find it difficult to distinguish themselves from the group.

So how does our group communicate now?

DARCY: Pearl, will you help Cyd proofread our report one more time?

Thanks.

TAL: I've got to paste in these graphics and then we're ready to print.

PEARL: When you get done, Tal, let me know, and I'll look that over as well.

TAL: Sure.

CYD: Oh, problem here. Look at page 14. Is this a mistake in the sentence or a mistake in our logic?

DARCY: Pearl, you worked on this part with Tal. You two take a look at it.

PEARL: (after conferring with Tal) No, just a problem in our grammar. The computer logic is fine. I think we wrote this section fairly fast. Must be our mistake. But we can fix it.

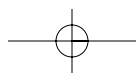
TAL: Okay, let me know when you're ready to print that page again. We're about ready to put this project to bed.

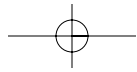
Our group has settled into effective role sharing in the performing stage. Trust is high, and the likelihood that anyone will be blamed for the grammatical mistake is quite low. This group is now successful (and satisfied with) using open discussion and problem solving.

How can a group maintain this stage? Groups that want to stay together and take on new activities must actively work to maintain the positive characteristics and attributes found in this stage (Wellins, Byham, & Wilson, 1991). By now, the group should be regularly involved in feedback and observation, rotating this responsibility among members.

Termination Finally, the group reaches its ending point or point of adjournment, or its **termination**. Some groups have a specific ending point, or a point at which members are removed or remove themselves from the group. Other groups dissipate more slowly over time, passing through phases of de-norming, de-storming, and de-forming (McGrew, Bilotta, & Deeney, 1999). Whether a group's ending is specific and identifiable or involves a process of decay, group members may feel anxiety as they become unsure about their future participation on this task or with these members.

Different types of groups have different types of endings. Some groups are formed for a specific purpose and terminate when the project or task is completed.





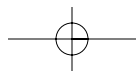
For example, your friends join together as a softball team in a summer league, and when the softball season is over, the team is finished. In contrast, your group of friends from high school who did everything together probably dissolved over time as one member after the next left for college, the military, or to full-time work. The ending to this group was gradual, and not planned in advance.

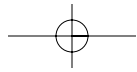
When groups end, members typically have emotional reactions. Some members may have enjoyed the group experience so much that they do not want the group to end. Thus they feel happiness and pleasure at having had a good group experience, but they also feel sadness and loss that the group is finally over (Rose, 1989). This type of group member may try to involve other group members in another group. When group members have had less positive experiences, they may be glad the group is over and express this emotion by distancing themselves as completely and as quickly as possible from the group activity and other group members.

Groups that are part of a larger organizational structure (your softball team in a city league, your project team at work) need to pay attention to how the group dissolves or terminates (Keyton, 1993). The interaction climate during the period of dissolution will affect the willingness and motivation of individuals when it comes time for the team to renew its activities or when group members are asked to join another team. Both substantive issues and symbolic ones should be addressed. The group should review what it accomplished and assess those accomplishments against its original objectives or goals. Some groups might need to prepare a formal report and decide who will be responsible for further inquiries about the group's outcome after the group is dissolved.

Groups that plan to work together again should summarize what the group accomplished, evaluate the effectiveness of procedures used for the task activity and group discussion, and assess the quality of relationships developed within the group. Additionally, differences and conflicts that were not fully resolved during the group's interaction should be addressed. In taking these steps, groups learn lessons about past group performance. In addition, the identities of individuals within the group are strengthened. This helps members maintain a connection to the group even when the group is inactive. Encouraging members to recognize the ending of the group and giving them opportunities to say goodbye to one another reinforces the existence of the team (Adato, 1975).

Celebrating success is an excellent way to solidify individuals' connections to the group when the group is done with its activities. Many groups conclude their work in a frantic or harried fashion, devoting little time to relationships or to individual or group reflection. Setting aside a time to celebrate helps group members bring closure to the group activity while strengthening group relationships. For instance, sports teams often celebrate the end of the season with a banquet or picnic. This is a good time to review highlights of the season (such as beating the team's archrival) and to thank people who helped support the group's activities. Even work groups should be encouraged to formally recognize their conclusion. It gives members an opportunity to make sense of their experiences, compare mental histories, and relive stories.





Progressing Through the Stages

Recall that not all groups move directly through one phase to the next. Groups develop their structure in response to many factors. For example, a group composed of members who do not know one another is likely to spend considerable time in the first three phases as the group works out its structure. This is frequently the case with your classroom groups. You must spend time getting to know one another before you can work effectively on the assigned task. In contrast, individuals who frequently find themselves together in groups will import their previous experiences with one another into a new group and move quickly through the first three phases to get to the performing stage.

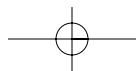
Other groups move through all phases for each activity, in effect recycling their development for each subsequent task. This is particularly true of groups with stable membership that are given different types of tasks over long periods. Group membership does not change, but each task the group works on creates new challenges to which the group must adapt its roles, structure, and relationships. If a new task is sufficiently different and challenging, a group will find itself repeating the group development cycle.

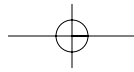
As mentioned previously, groups can slip backward instead of progressing forward through the stages (Wellins, Byham, & Wilson, 1991). Why does this occur? Sometimes groups acquire new members, and this causes the group to revisit the forming and storming phases until the new member is integrated into the group. A team's progression can also be upset by a trauma or other critical event. If the event is significant enough to cause emotional upheaval among group members, the group may find itself back in the storming stage. This is likely to happen if the trauma renders useless what the group has accomplished. Now, once again, the group has to move through conflict to refocus on its goal. In addition, groups can regress through the stages if group members fail to pay attention to issues of group development. Length of time together does not ensure steady progression through the stages of group development. Try "How Far Has Your Group Developed?" to identify the current stage of your group.

Thus group development acknowledges that a group's structure can change as its history evolves and its level of maturity changes (Mennecke, Hoffer, & Wynne, 1992). A group's history is based on how much time it has spent together and on the quality of its interactions. What group members have shared or not shared impacts the group's development. If we look at time spent together—a group's history—it seems logical to analyze a group's development as a linear process. But we also must consider the degree of cohesiveness, which reflects the group's maturity, and cohesiveness among group members can fluctuate greatly throughout a group's history.

Summary

When you send verbal and nonverbal messages to other group members, you are creating roles. A combination of formal and informal roles creates a structure for





EVALUATING GROUP SUCCESS

How Far Has Your Group Developed?

Circle the numbers of the statements that best describe the current activity of your group.

1. We keep asking what we are doing and why.
2. Team members do not know one another.
3. We are unclear about what we are supposed to do.
4. We are having trouble getting along.
5. Members are jockeying for power.
6. We disagree about how to proceed.
7. We are seeing the progress of our work.
8. Team members are open and honest in asking questions and giving feedback.
9. As we get to know one another better, we are working more smoothly together.
10. We feel pride in our accomplishments.
11. We are really “cookin’.”
12. We all do what it takes to get the job done.

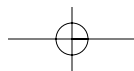
If most of your circles are for items 1–3, then your group is forming. If most of your circles are for items 4–6, then your group is storming. If most of your circles are for items 7–9, then your group is norming. If most of your circles are for items 10–12, then your group is performing. Given the time your group has been together, is this where your group should be? How effectively are group members communicating in this stage? How could you contribute to the group’s interactions in this stage?

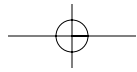
Source: Adapted from Gardenswartz and Rowe (1994).

the group and its members. In turn, these roles shape group members’ interaction. Formal roles are those that are required by the group—president, vice-president, secretary, and so on. Typically, group members are elected or appointed to these roles. Even when a group does not have formal roles, group members should consider selecting a leader, recorder, and critical advisor to help the group manage its communication and activities.

Informal roles are those that emerge through group members’ interaction. All group members take on some informal roles, whether those are task roles or maintenance roles. But too many members in the same informal role creates an imbalance and often leads to competition. Group members should be flexible, not rigid, in assuming roles. Sometimes a group member will take on an individual role, which is counterproductive for the group. Because group settings should be learning experiences, rotating formal roles will help each group member learn the nuances of each role.

Norms are expectations group members have about their group experiences. Members may come to the group setting with expectations developed from previous



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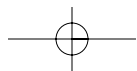
experience. Additionally, a group's interaction establishes its own norms and expectations—positively or negatively. You should be able to recognize your role in setting and developing these expectations. Even if you take a quiet or submissive role, your interaction in the group actively shapes what happens in the group. You have a responsibility to gauge your own interaction and its effect on the group. It is important, though, to remember that each group is different; thus different norms will guide your speaking and listening strategies. Your ability to be flexible within group situations and across different types of groups will increase your effectiveness as a group member.

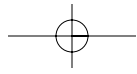
Each group creates a communication network—a pattern or flow of messages among group members. A decentralized network allows each group member to talk to every other group member. Alternately, centralized networks impose restrictions on who can talk to whom.

A group's structure—its roles, norms, and communication network—is affected when group membership changes and as the group develops over time. Some groups face regular turnover issues. Membership change can either increase or decrease the amount of work a group member must accomplish, can be voluntary or forced upon a group, can occur at a natural breaking point or be unexpected and dramatic, and can affect members in central or peripheral roles. These changes will affect interaction and performance dynamics in the group, the group's history, and the ability of group members to rely on a group memory. Welcoming new group members, talking about nonthreatening topics, and introducing one another are ways to assimilate group members.

There are five recognizable stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and termination. In the forming stage, group members maintain a strong self-orientation because trust is not high in the group. As members state their individual preferences and opinions, the second phase, storming, occurs. In this phase, conflict occurs as a natural part of the group's development. Members may compete for attention from one another, as well as for roles. Once the conflicting issues are resolved, a group enters the norming stage. Here group members are comfortable with their roles and responsibilities and work well with others. The group finds that it is a “we” rather than a collection of “I's.” The fourth stage is performing, in which the group completes its task activities. The group has reached clarity and consensus on its goals, and group members are tightly integrated. Finally, a group reaches termination, the ending point of the group. Depending on the quality of interaction among group members, this may be an anxiety-producing stage, a stage full of regret, or a stage characterized by a sense of loss over the group's conclusion. Celebrating the success of a group with a party is an excellent way to solidify group members' connections to the group and to recognize collective and individual achievements.

Although there is the assumption that groups progress steadily through the five stages, not all groups spend equal time in each phase. And groups may double back and revisit previous stages when new members enter the group or when the group encounters new tasks or crises.





Discussion Questions and Exercises

1. Many of the roles discussed in this chapter were developed for problem-solving or decision-making groups. What do you believe are the essential formal roles in a support or therapy group? in a group of friends who regularly play on the same sports team?
2. Think back to one of your positive group experiences. Identify the formal and informal roles of each group member. How did the formal and informal roles of the group members interact? For example, did one member's formal role carry over into the group's informal role structure? Did the integration of roles differ in a negative group experience? How so?
3. Groups frequently develop norms for the following group interaction elements: (a) specificity about meeting start times, (b) patterns of who talks to whom, (c) proportion of talk about the group goal or purpose versus talk about relationships or group maintenance issues, (d) the ways decisions are made, and (e) the means by which necessary information is passed along to group members outside the group environment. With two specific but different groups in mind, write an analysis comparing and contrasting the groups on these five elements. Try to identify what led to the differences in norm development. What influences encouraged norm similarity?
4. Observe a group in action (for example, the city council, an advisory group, or the student council), and diagram its communication network. Identify the type of communication network that emerges in the group's interaction. After evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the network, what suggestions would you make to the group and to individual members for changing the network structure?
5. Interview a member of a fraternity or sorority. Develop questions that allow this group member to talk about what changes in the group's structure—roles, norms, and communication network—occur each year as members graduate and new members enter.
6. Talk with someone who is a member of a work group or task team where they are employed. Ask them questions that allow them to reflect on how their group started and developed. Do you find evidence of the five stages in their responses?