GROUP DYNAMICS

7. Group Behavior

7.1. Introduction

Group behavior in sociology refers to the situations where people interact in large or small groups. The field of group dynamics deals with small groups that may reach consensus and act in a coordinated way. Groups of a large number of people in a given area may act simultaneously to achieve a goal that differs from what individuals would do acting alone, called herd behavior. A large group, crowd or mob, is likely to show examples of group behavior when people gathered in a given place and time act in a similar way for example, joining a protest or march, participating in a fight or acting patriotically.

Special forms of large group behavior are:

- **Crowd "hysteria"**
- **Spectators -** When a group of people gather together on purpose to participate in an event like theatre play, cinema movie, football match, a concert, etc.
- **Public -** Exception to the rule that the group must occupy the same physical place. People watching same channel on television may react in the same way, as they are occupying the same type of place, in front of television, although they may physically be doing this all over the world.

Group behavior differs from mass actions, which refers to people who behave similarly on a more global scale (for example, shoppers in different shops), while group behavior refers usually to people in one place. If the group behavior is coordinated, then it is called group action. Swarm intelligence is a special case of group behavior where group members interact to fulfill a specific task.

7.2. Joining Groups & Defining Characteristics

People join groups for a multitude of reasons. A major reason is that group membership often results in some form of need satisfaction on the part of the

individual. Membership in a group can fulfill numerous needs, including some that group members may not realize they benefit from:

- **Companionship** – groups provide members to simply be in the company of other people.
- **Survival and security** – From a historic or evolutionary perspective our ancestors would partake in group experiences for hunting and defense.
- **Affiliation and status** – Membership into various groups can provide individuals with certain social status or security.
- **Power and control**– With group membership comes the opportunity for leadership roles; individuals who feel they need to exert their power and opinions over others can have such experiences within group settings.
- **Achievement** – Groups have the capability to achieve more than individuals acting alone.

Organizations typically form groups to accomplish work related tasks. However, a member of a work group may unintentionally reap numerous benefits that are independent of the original group construct.

Currently, no universal definition describes what constitutes a group. Groups can have varying numbers of members, communication styles, and structures. Research identifies a few common requirements that contribute to recognition of individuals that work in a collaborative environment considered a "group":

- **Interdependence:** For an individual of the collective to accomplish their part in the assigned task, they depend, to some degree, on outputs of other collective members.
- **Social interaction:** To accomplish the goal requires some form of verbal or nonverbal communication amongst members of the collective.
- **Perception of a group:** All members of the collective must agree they are, in fact, part of a group.
- **Commonality of purpose:** All the members of the collective come together to serve or attain a common goal.
- **Favoritism:** Members of the same group tend to be *positively* prejudiced toward other members and tend to discriminate in their favor.

Some researchers suggest additional characteristics must be identified to categorize a collective of individuals as a group such as: working the same shifts, shared physical work locations, and reporting to the same manager. However the commonalities of the multiple definitions reviewed suggest that the definition of a

group is based on the interdependence of people who come together to accomplish a common goal.

Group types are routinely distinguished by the work that the groups do:

- **Production groups** consist of front line employees who produce some tangible output. Autonomous production groups are self-directed or self-managing while semi-autonomous production groups typically have a dedicated supervisor who oversees all operations.
- **Service groups** consist of employees that work with customers on a repeated basis, such as airline teams, maintenance groups, sales groups, call centers, etc.
- **Management groups** consist of an executive or senior manager along with managers that report directly to him/her. Management groups are often able to organize themselves towards goals such as policy making, budgeting, staffing, and planning.
- **Project groups** are generally cross-function groups of individuals brought together for the duration of a specific, time-limited project. Project groups are usually disbanded once the project is complete.
- **Action and performing groups** are groups that typically consist of expert specialists who conduct complex, time-limited performance events. Examples include musical bands, military crews, surgery teams, rescue units or professional music groups.
- **Advisory groups** consist of employees that work outside of, but parallel with, production processes. Examples include quality circles, selection committees, or other advisory groups pulled together to make recommendations to an organization.

7.3. Group Structure & Communication Patterns

A group's structure is the internal framework that defines members' relations to one another over time. The most important elements of group structure are roles, norms, values, communication patterns, and status differentials. A "role" can be defined as a tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way. Roles may be assigned formally, but more often are defined through the process of role differentiation. Role differentiation is the degree to which different group members have specialized functions. Functional (task) roles are generally defined in relation to the tasks the team is expected to perform. Other types of roles are the socio-emotional role, which helps maintain the social fabric

of the group, the individual role and the leader role. Group "norms" are the informal rules that groups adopt to regulate members' behavior. Norms refer to what should be done and represent value judgments about appropriate behavior in social situations. Although they are infrequently written down or even discussed, norms have powerful influence on group behavior.

Group "values" are goals or ideas that serve as guiding principles for the group. Like norms, values may be communicated either explicitly or on an ad hoc basis. Values can serve as a rallying point for the team. However, some values, such as conformity, can also be dysfunction and lead to poor decisions by the team. Communication patterns describe the flow of information within the group and they are typically described as either centralized or decentralized. With a centralized pattern, communications tend to flow from one source to all group members. Centralized communications allow consistent, standardization information but they may restrict the free flow of information. Decentralized communications make it easy to share information directly between group members. When decentralized, communications tend to flow more freely, but the delivery of information may not be as fast or accurate as with centralized communications. Another potential downside of decentralized communications is the sheer volume of information that can be generated, particularly with electronic media.

7.4. Stages of Group Development & Intergroup Behavior/Dynamics

Group development focuses on the somewhat unique way groups are formed and the way they may change over time. There are a variety of development theories and some suggest that groups develop through a series of phases culminating in effective performance. The most common of these models is Tuckman's stages of group development model. It breaks group development into the following five stages:

- **Forming:** As the group convenes, conflict is usually low to non-existent as everyone tries to determine their individual role and the personalities of fellow team members. This stage is often marked by agreeable neutrality while the group takes form and begins to navigate the unknown.
- **Storming:** Storming occurs after the group overcomes the sense of uncertainty and begins to actively explore roles and boundaries. Chaos, pronounced efforts to influence others, and instances of conflict and/or enthusiasm are common.

- **Norming:** Norming in groups indicate that norms and role ownership are emerging. Generally this means that conflict and chaos is decreasing or has ended.
- **Performing:** Originally noted as the final stage, performing occurs when the team completes their primary task(s).
- **Adjourning:** Tuckman refined the model to include a fifth stage to address how the group begins to disengage and move on to new tasks potentially beyond the team.

While Tuckman's model is useful in describing developmental processes, there are instances when groups do not strictly adhere to the exact sequence. Additionally, the storming stage may decrease but not fully dissipate and continue across other stages.

Intergroup behavior, or the way groups interact with other groups, is best examined in terms of the frequency and interaction type the groups engage in. Thomas elaborated on this concept by noting that the nature of intergroup interactions depends largely on the degree to which groups must interact to achieve their goals, and the degree of compatibility between the goals of different groups.

- **Accommodation** interaction is based on groups having similar goals and taking part in minimal to moderate mutual concession and cooperation to achieve them.
- **Avoidance** interaction is found between groups where there are different or conflicting goals and even minimal collaboration is not warranted. Both of these interactions are viewed as having no to low impact on successfully achieving each group's goals.
- **Collaboration** interaction is necessary when the goals of two groups are largely compatible and partnership is required for successful goal accomplishment.
- **Competition** interaction usually occurs when two groups must interact to meet specific goals that are vastly incompatible.
- **Compromise** interaction occurs when two groups have a moderate need to interact to meet specific goals that are moderately compatible. In this interaction, the two groups may work together on a semi-regular basis to ensure they are on track to meet the overlapping goals.
- **De-individuation** is a phenomenon that occurs when individuals of a group become less aware of their values.

- **Diffusion of responsibility** is the tendency for group members to feel diminished responsibility for their actions when surrounded by others who are behaving in a similar manner.
- **Intergroup behavior** is influenced by factors beyond interaction types. Examples of these include Interdependence, Organizational Culture, Past History, and Organizational Social Networks.
- **Interdependence** is the degree to which group depend on each other and is determined by the type of group tasks (i.e., simple versus complex), organization structure, and the organizational authority system). Interdependence may occur in one of three common forms:
  - **Pooled interdependence:** The combined efforts of largely separate groups positively contribute to the organization.
  - **Sequential interdependence:** The effort or output of one group is used as the input for another group.
  - **Reciprocal interdependence:** A series of mutual exchanges between groups, requiring a high degree of continuous interactions.
- **Organizational culture** and its shared norms, values, and power structure, often dictate the frequency and degree to which intergroup interactions and collaborations occur.
- **Past history with intergroup relationships** also impact interdependence behavior. The influence of this factor is directly connected to the past interaction experience between groups. Whether the interaction was positive or negative, new group members may be influenced in the direction of the group's previous experience.
- **Social networks in organizations** are another vital factor when considering intergroup behavior. Cordial individual group member interaction is believed to greatly impact the quality of intergroup relationships.