



: a number of people or things that are together or in the same place

: a number of people who are connected by some shared activity, interest, or quality

: a number of things that are related in some way

### Full Definition of **GROUP**

1

: two or more figures forming a complete unit in a composition

2

*a* : a number of individuals assembled together or having some unifying relationship

*b* : an assemblage of objects regarded as a unit

*c (1)* : a military unit consisting of a headquarters and attached battalions (2)

: a unit of the United States Air Force higher than a squadron and lower than a wing

3

*a* : an assemblage of related organisms —often used to avoid taxonomic connotations when the kind or degree of relationship is not clearly defined

*b (1)* : two or more atoms joined together or sometimes a single atom forming part of a molecule; especially : **FUNCTIONAL GROUP** <a methyl *group*> (2) : an assemblage of elements forming one of the vertical columns of the periodic table

*c* : a stratigraphic division comprising rocks deposited during an era

4

: a mathematical set that is closed under a binary associative operation, contains an identity element, and has an inverse for every element

[🔗 See \*\*group\*\* defined for English-language learners »](#)

See [group](#) defined for kids »

### Examples of **GROUP**

1. It'll be easier if we go there as a *group*.
2. She presented the idea to the *group*.
3. We like to let these students work **in groups** whenever possible.
4. She belongs to an environmental *group*.
5. She joined a discussion *group*.
6. A select *group* of scientists has been invited to the conference.

## Definitions of LGAT

DuMerton described Large Group Awareness Training as "teaching simple, but often overlooked wisdom, which takes place over the period of a few days, in which individuals receive intense, emotionally-focused instruction". [1] Rubinstein compared large-group awareness training to certain principles of cognitive therapy, such as the idea that people can change their lives by interpreting the way they view external circumstances.[2] And in *Consumer Research: Postcards from the edge*, when discussing behavioral and economic studies, the authors contrasted the "enclosed locations" used with Large Group Awareness Trainings with the "relatively open" environment of a "variety store".[10]

The *Handbook of Group Psychotherapy* described Large Group Awareness Training as focusing on "philosophical, psychological and ethical issues", as related to a desire to increase personal effectiveness in people's lives.<sup>[11]</sup>

Psychologist Dennis Coon's textbook, *Psychology: A Journey*, defined the term "LGAT" as referring to: "programs that claim to increase self-awareness and facilitate constructive personal change".[2] Coon further defines Large Group Awareness Training in his book *Introduction to Psychology*.<sup>[12]</sup>

## The evolution of LGAT-providers

Lou Kilzer, in *The Rocky Mountain News*, identified Leadership Dynamics (in operation 1967-1973) as the first of the genre of what psychologists termed "Large Group Awareness Training".<sup>[13]</sup>

In their self-published book, Navarro and Navarro identify Mind Dynamics (in operation 1968-1973) as the major forerunner of large group awareness trainings.<sup>[14]</sup> They write that, although Mind Dynamics itself existed only briefly, it sparked an industry of similar trainings.<sup>[14]</sup>

Groups and trainings such as Lifespring (1974-ca 1995), Erhard Seminars Training (1971-1981), IMPACT Trainings, The Forum (1981-1991), Newfield Consulting, Seres Naturales, Landmark Education (1991-2013) and Benchmark claimed to have worked to improve people's overall level of satisfaction and interpersonal relations through group interaction.<sup>[15] [16][17]</sup>

## Academic analyses, studies

"Large Group Awareness Training", a 1982 peer-reviewed article published in *Annual Review of Psychology*, sought to summarize literature on the subject of LGATs and to examine their efficacy and their relationship with more standard psychology. This academic article describes and analyzes large group awareness training from a psychological perspective. Influenced by the work of humanistic psychologists such as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Rollo May and sometimes associated with the human potential movement,<sup>[18][19]</sup> LGATs as commercial trainings took many techniques from encounter groups.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> They existed alongside but "outside the domains of academic psychology or psychiatry. Their measure of performance was consumer satisfaction and formal research was seldom pursued."<sup>[20]</sup>

The article describes an est training, and discusses the literature on the testimony of est graduates. It notes minor changes on psychological tests after the training and mentions anecdotal reports of psychiatric casualties among est trainees. The article considers how est compares to more standard psychotherapy techniques such as behavior therapy, group and existential psychotherapy before concluding with a call for "objective and rigorous research" and stating that unknown variables might have accounted for some of the positive accounts. Psychologists advised borderline or psychotic patients not to participate.<sup>[20]</sup>

Psychological factors cited by academics include emotional "flooding", catharsis, universality (identification with others), the instillation of hope, identification and what Sartre called "uncontested authorship".<sup>[20]</sup>

In 1989 researchers from the University of Connecticut received the "National Consultants to Management Award" from the American Psychological Association for their study: Evaluating a Large Group Awareness Training.<sup>[21]</sup> The study concluded that participation in the LGAT studied (the Forum) had very little impact on participants.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Psychologist Chris Mathe has written in the interests of consumer-protection, encouraging potential attendees of LGATs to discuss such trainings with any current therapist or counselor, to examine the principles underlying the program, and to determine pre-screening methods, the training of facilitators, the full cost of the training and of any suggested follow-up care.<sup>[22]</sup>

## **LGAT techniques**

Finkelstein's 1982 article provides a detailed description of the structure and techniques of an Erhard Seminars Training event, noting an authoritarian demeanor of the trainer, physical strains on the participants from a long schedule, and the similarity of many techniques to those used in some group

therapy and encounter groups.<sup>[20]</sup> The academic textbook, *Handbook of Group Psychotherapy* regards Large Group Awareness Training organisations as "less open to leader differences", because they follow a "detailed written plan" that does not vary from one training to the next.<sup>[11]</sup>

Specific techniques used in Large Group Awareness Trainings may include:

- meditation<sup>[23]</sup>
- biofeedback<sup>[23]</sup>
- self-hypnosis<sup>[23]</sup>
- relaxation techniques<sup>[23]</sup>
- visualization<sup>[23]</sup>
- neuro-linguistic programming<sup>[24]</sup>
- mind-control<sup>[23]</sup>
- yoga<sup>[23]</sup>

LGATs utilize such techniques during long sessions, sometimes called a "marathon" session. Paglia describes "EST's Large Group Awareness Training": "Marathon, eight-hour sessions, in which [participants] were confined and harassed, supposedly led to the breakdown of conventional ego, after which they were in effect born again."<sup>[25]</sup>

In his book *Life 102*, LGAT participant and former trainer Peter McWilliams describes the basic technique of marathon trainings as *pressure/release* and asserts that advertising uses pressure/release "all the time", as do "good cop/bad cop" police-interrogations and revival meetings. By spending approximately half the time making a person feel bad and then suddenly reversing the feeling through effusive praise, the programs cause participants to experience a stress-reaction and an "endorphin high". McWilliams gives examples of various LGAT activities called *processes* with names such as "love bomb," "lifeboat", "cocktail party" and "cradling" which take place over many hours and days, physically exhausting the participants to make them more susceptible to the trainer's message, whether in the participants' best interests or not.<sup>[26]</sup>

Although extremely critical of some LGATs, McWilliams found positive value in others, asserting that they varied not in technique but in the application of technique.<sup>[26]</sup>

## **Evaluations of LGATs**

Finkelstein noted the many difficulties in evaluating LGATs, from proponents' explicit rejection of certain study models to difficulty in establishing a rigorous control group.<sup>[20]</sup> In some cases, organizations under study have partially funded research into themselves.<sup>[27]</sup>

Not all professional researchers view LGATs favorably. Researchers such as psychologist Philip Cushman,<sup>[28]</sup> for example, found that the program he studied "consists of a pre-meditated attack on the self". A 1983 study on Lifespring<sup>[29]</sup> found that "although participants often experience a heightened sense of well-being as a consequence of the training, the phenomenon is essentially pathological", meaning that, in the program studied, "the training systematically undermines ego functioning and promotes regression to the extent that reality testing is significantly impaired". Lieberman's 1987 study,<sup>[27]</sup> funded partially by Lifespring, noted that 5 out of a sample of 289 participants experienced "stress reactions" including one "transitory psychotic episode". He commented: "Whether [these five] would have experienced such stress under other conditions cannot be answered. The clinical evidence, however, is that the reactions were directly attributable to the large group awareness training."

The Vatican has opined on "New Age training courses":

New Age training courses (what used to be known as "Erhard seminar trainings" [EST] etc.) marry counter-cultural values with the mainstream need to succeed, inner satisfaction with outer success [...]<sup>[30]</sup>

In Coon's psychology textbook (*Introduction to Psychology*) the author references many other studies, which postulate that many of the "claimed benefits" of Large Group Awareness Training actually take the form of "a kind of therapy placebo effect".<sup>[12]</sup> DuMerton writes that "... there is a lack of scientific evidence to quantify the longer-term positive outcomes and changes objectively ..."<sup>[7]</sup> Jarvis described Large Group Awareness Training as "educationally dubious" in the 2002 book *The Theory & Practice of Teaching*.<sup>[31]</sup>

Tapper mentions that "some [unspecified] large group-awareness training and psychotherapy groups" exemplify non-religious "cults".<sup>[32]</sup> Benjamin criticizes LGAT groups for their high prices and spiritual subtleties.<sup>[33]</sup> In an academic research-paper on "Choices", a type of LGAT, researchers credited LGAT programs with having had perhaps a million American attendees, many of whom gave positive testimonials of "healing effects" and "positive outcomes in their lives".<sup>[7]</sup>

## **LGATs in comparison with cults**

### **Singer**

The American Psychological Association commissioned and subsequently decided not to endorse<sup>[34]</sup> and strongly criticised <sup>[35]</sup> a report by the APA Task Force on Deceptive and Indirect Techniques of Persuasion and Control, in which the anti-cult psychologist Margaret Singer included large group awareness trainings as one example of what she called "coercive persuasion". The APA

characterized Singer's hypotheses as "uninformed speculations based on skewed data" <sup>[35]</sup> and stated that the report "[i]n general" lacked "the scientific rigor and evenhanded critical approach necessary for APA imprimatur." <sup>[34]</sup> The APA also claimed that "the specific methods by which Drs. Singer and Benson have arrived at their conclusions have also been rejected by all serious scholars in the field."<sup>[35]</sup> Singer sued the APA, and lost on June 17, 1994.<sup>[36]</sup> After the APA spurned the report, Singer remained in good standing in the psychological research community.<sup>[37]</sup> Singer reworked much of the report material into the book *Cults in our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives* (1995, second edition: 2003), which she co-authored with Janja Lalich.

Singer and Lalich stated that "large group awareness trainings" tend to last at least four days and usually five. Their book mentions Erhard Seminars Training and its derivatives such as the Forum, "Lifespring, Actualizations, MSIA/Insight and PSI Seminars.<sup>[38]</sup>

In her book, Singer differentiated between the usage of the terms *cult* and *Large Group Awareness Training*.<sup>[38]</sup><sup>[page needed]</sup> while pointing out some commonalities.<sup>[39]</sup><sup>[40]</sup> Elsewhere she groups the two phenomena together in that they both use a shared set of thought-reform techniques.<sup>[41]</sup> Singer also writes that employees taking part in a company-wide Large Group Awareness Training program not only complained about attempted religious conversion, but also objected to the specific techniques used.<sup>[23]</sup>

## Langone

An article in Cult Observer by Michael Langone Ph.D. analysed Large Group Awareness Training.<sup>[3]</sup> Langone noted comparisons between Large Group Awareness Training and "brainwashing" and "cults"; and posited that many LGAT groups have an implied or even explicit religious nature.<sup>[3]</sup> Langone concluded by stating that he knew of no specific academic research which showed that Large Group Awareness Trainings have positive behavioral effects.<sup>[3]</sup> Langone cited a study which showed no difference between the Large Group Awareness Training test-subjects and the control group.<sup>[3]</sup><sup>[42]</sup>

## ICSA

The International Cultic Studies Association has grouped some Large Group Awareness Training organizations together with research about them.<sup>[43]</sup>

Improving Group Dynamics

Helping Your Team Work More Effectively

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A "joker" in your team can create negative group dynamics.

Imagine that you've brought together the brightest people in your department to solve a problem.

You had high hopes for the group, so you feel frustrated when people can't come to a decision.

Several factors are holding the group back.

To start with, one person is very critical of colleagues' ideas. You suspect that her fault-finding is discouraging others from speaking up.

Another has hardly contributed to the sessions at all. When asked for his opinion, he simply agrees with a more dominant colleague.

Finally, one group member makes humorous comments at unhelpful times, which upsets the momentum of the discussion.

These are classic examples of poor group dynamics, and they can undermine the success of a project, as well as people's morale and engagement.

In this article, we'll look at what group dynamics are, and why they matter. We'll then discuss some examples of poor group dynamics, and we'll outline some tools that you can use to deal with them.

### What Are Group Dynamics?

Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist and change management expert, is credited with coining the term "group dynamics" in the early 1940s. He noted that people often take on distinct roles and behaviors when they work in a group. "Group dynamics" describes the effects of these roles and behaviors on other group members, and on the group as a whole.

More recent researchers have built on Lewin's ideas, and this work has become central to good management practice.

A group with a positive dynamic is easy to spot. Team members trust one another, they work towards a collective decision, and they hold one another accountable for making things happen. As well as this, researchers have found that when a team has a positive dynamic, its members are nearly twice as creative as an average group.

In a group with poor group dynamics, people's behavior disrupts work. As a result, the group may not come to any decision, or it may make the wrong choice, because group members could not explore options effectively.

### What Causes Poor Group Dynamics?

Group leaders and team members can contribute to a negative group dynamic. Let's look at some of the most common problems that can occur:

- **Weak leadership:** when a team lacks a strong leader, a more dominant member of the group can often take charge. This can lead to a lack of direction, infighting, or a focus on the wrong priorities.
- **Excessive deference to authority:** this can happen when people want to be seen to agree with a leader, and therefore hold back from expressing their own opinions.
- **Blocking:** this happens when team members behave in a way that disrupts the flow of information in the group. People can adopt blocking roles such as:
  - **The aggressor:** this person often disagrees with others, or is inappropriately outspoken.
  - **The negator:** this group member is often critical of others' ideas.
  - **The withdrawer:** this person doesn't participate in the discussion.
  - **The recognition seeker:** this group member is boastful, or dominates the session.
  - **The joker:** this person introduces humor at inappropriate times.
- Groupthink : this happens when people place a desire for consensus above their desire to reach the right decision. This prevents people from fully exploring alternative solutions.
- **Free riding:** here, some group members take it easy, and leave their colleagues to do all the work. Free riders may work hard on their own, but limit their contributions in group situations; this is known as "social loafing."
- **Evaluation apprehension:** team members' perceptions can also create a negative group dynamic. Evaluation apprehension happens when people feel that they are being judged excessively harshly by other group members, and they hold back their opinions as a result.

## Strategies for Improving Team Dynamics

Use these approaches to improve group dynamics:

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#### Know Your Team

As a leader, you need to guide the development of your group. So, start by learning about the phases that a group goes through as it develops. When you understand these, you'll be able to preempt problems that could arise, including issues with poor group dynamics.

Next, use Benne and Sheats' Group Roles to identify positive and negative group roles, and to understand how they could affect the group as a whole. This will also help you plan how to deal with potential problems.

#### Tackle Problems Quickly

If you notice that one member of your team has adopted a behavior that's affecting the group unhelpfully, act quickly to challenge it.

Provide feedback that shows your team member the impact of her actions, and encourage her to reflect on how she can change her behavior.

#### Define Roles and Responsibilities

Teams that lack focus or direction can quickly develop poor dynamics, as people struggle to understand their role in the group.

Create a team charter – defining the group's mission and objective, and everyone's responsibilities – as soon as you form the team. Make sure that everyone has a copy of the document, and remind people of it regularly.

### Break Down Barriers

Use team-building exercises to help everyone get to know one another, particularly when new members join the group. These exercises ease new colleagues into the group gently, and also help to combat the "black sheep effect," which happens when group members turn against people they consider different.

Also, explain the idea of the Johari Window to help people open up. Lead by example: share what you hope the group will achieve, along with "safe" personal information about yourself, such as valuable lessons that you've learned.

### Focus on Communication

Open communication is central to good team dynamics, so make sure that everyone is communicating clearly. Include all of the forms of communication that your group uses – emails, meetings, and shared documents, for example – to avoid any ambiguity.

If the status of a project changes, or if you have an announcement to make, let people know as soon as possible. That way, you can ensure that everyone has the same information.

Opinionated team members can overwhelm their quieter colleagues in meetings. Where this happens, use techniques such as Crawford's Slip Writing Method, and make sure that you develop strong facilitation skills.

### Pay Attention

Watch out for the warning signs of poor group dynamics.

Pay particular attention to frequent unanimous decisions, as these can be a sign of groupthink, bullying, or free riding. If there are frequent unanimous decisions in your group, consider exploring new ways to encourage people to discuss their views, or to share them anonymously.

### Key Points

The term "group dynamics" describes the way in which people in a group interact with one another. When dynamics are positive, the group works well together. When dynamics are poor, the group's effectiveness is reduced.

Problems can come from weak leadership, too much deference to authority, blocking, groupthink and free riding, among others.

To strengthen your team's dynamics, use the following strategies:

Know your team.

Tackle problems quickly with good feedback.

Define roles and responsibilities.

Break down barriers.

Focus on communication.

Pay attention.

Keep in mind that observing how your group interacts is an important part of your role as a leader. Many of the behaviors that lead to poor dynamics can be overcome if you catch them early