

GROUP DYNAMICS:

A. GROUP FORMATION

A group is able to share experiences, to provide feedback, to pool ideas, to generate insights, and provide an arena for analysis of experiences. The group provides a measure of support and reassurance. Moreover, as a group, learners may also plan collectively for change action. Group discussion is a very effective learning method.

i Participation

Participation is a fundamental process within a group, because many of the other processes depend upon participation of the various members. Levels and degrees of participation vary. Some members are active participants while others are more withdrawn and passive. In essence, participation means involvement, concern for the task, and direct or indirect contribution to the group goal. If members do not participate, the group ceases to exist.

Factors which affect members participation

- The **content** or task of the group- is it of interest, importance and relevance?
- The **physical atmosphere** - is it comfortable physically, socially and psychologically?
- The **psychological atmosphere** - is it accepting, non-threatening?
- Member's **personal preoccupations** - are there any distracting thoughts in their mind?
- The **level of interaction** and discussions - is adequate information provided for everyone to understand? - is it at a level **everyone** understands?
- **Familiarity** - between group members- do members know each other from before?

ii Communication

Communication within a group deals with the spoken and the unspoken, the verbal and the non-verbal, the explicit and the implied messages that are conveyed and exchanged relating to information and ideas, and feelings.

Two-way communication implies a situation where not only the two parties talk to each other, but that they are listening to each other as well. It helps in

- Clarification of doubts, confusions and misconceptions
- Both parties understanding each other
- Receiving and giving of feedback

It indicates the degree of respect between the two parties

Helpful hints for effective communication

1. Have a circular seating arrangement so that everyone can see and interact with everyone else
2. If there are two facilitators, they should sit apart so that communication flow is not in one direction
3. Respect individuals- let everyone call everyone else by name respectfully
4. Encourage and support the quiet members to voice their opinions
5. Try and persuade the people who speak too much to give others a chance
6. Ensure that only one person speaks at a time or no one else will be heard
7. Discourage sub groups from indulging in side talk

iii Problem solving

Most groups find themselves unable to solve problems because they address the problem at a superficial level. After that they find themselves blocked because they cannot figure out why the problem occurred and how they can tackle it. Therefore an effective problem solving procedure would be to:

1. Clearly define the problem: Is it what appears on the surface or are there deep hidden aspects?
2. Try to thoroughly explore and understand the causes behind the problem
3. Collect additional information, from elsewhere if necessary, and analyze it to understand the problem further
4. The group should suspend criticism and judgment for a while and try to combine each other's ideas or add on improvements. The objectives should be to generate as many ideas and suggestions as possible. This is called "brainstorming" in a group, when individuals try lateral thinking.

iv Leadership

Leadership involves focussing the efforts of the people towards a common goal and to enable them to work together as one. In general we designate one individual as a leader. This individual may be chosen from within or appointed from outside. Thus, one member may provide leadership with respect to achieving the goal while a different individual may be providing leadership in maintaining the group as a group. These roles can switch and change.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF GROUPS

The developmental process of small groups can be viewed in several ways. Firstly, it is useful to know the persons who compose a particular small group.

- People bring their past experiences
- People come with their personalities (their perceptions, attitudes and values)
- People also come with a particular set of expectations

The priorities and expectations of persons comprising a group can influence the manner in which the group develops over a period of time

Stages

Viewing the group as a whole we observe definite patterns of behaviour occurring within a group. These can be grouped into stages.

FIRST STAGE

The initial stage in the life of a group is concerned with forming a group. This stage is characterized by members seeking safety and protection, tentativeness of response, seeking superficial contact with others, demonstrating dependency on existing authority figures. Members at this stage either engage in busy type of activity or show apathy.

SECOND STAGE

The second stage in this group is marked by the formation of dyads and triads. Members seek out familiar or similar individuals and begin a deeper sharing of self. Continued attention to the subgroup creates a

differentiation in the group and tensions across the dyads /triads may appear. Pairing is a common phenomenon.

THIRD STAGE

The third developmental stage is marked by a more serious concern about task performance. The dyads/triads begin to open up and seek out other members in the group. Efforts are made to establish various norms for task performance. Members begin to take greater responsibility for their own group and relationship while the authority figure becomes relaxed.

FOURTH STAGE

This is a stage of a fully functional group where members see themselves as a group and get involved in the task. Each person makes a contribution and the authority figure is also seen as a part of the group. Group norms are followed and collective pressure is exerted to ensure the effectiveness of the group. The group redefines its goals in the light of information from the outside environment and shows an autonomous will to pursue those goals. The long-term viability of the group is established and nurtured.

C. FACILITATING A GROUP

A group cannot automatically function effectively, it needs to be facilitated. Facilitation can be described as a conscious process of assisting a group to successfully achieve its task while functioning as a group. Facilitation can be performed by members themselves, or with the help of an outsider.

To facilitate effectively the facilitator needs to

- Understand what is happening within the group
- Be aware of his/her own personality
- And know how to facilitate

GROUP DIAGNOSIS

The process of finding out what is going on in a group may be called diagnosing. It is an essential skill of a facilitator. Diagnosis involves understanding the causes after looking for clues within the group and outside the group. Some examples follow to illustrate the point.

- Problem** Not everyone participates or shows interest and a few remain silent
- Possible causes** Perhaps the goal or task is not relevant to some of the participants. Some of the members may feel insecure or dominant on the basis of caste, class, education or gender.
- Problem** Some members ignore or disregard contributions from other members
- Possible causes** Members of the group may be nervous and unaware of others' needs.
- Problem** The group is not able to come to consensus or are unable to devise a plan to implement the decision.
- Possible causes** Perhaps the group lacks adequate information or skills to solve the problem. Perhaps the decision is threatening to some of the group members. Perhaps the group fears failure.