

CHAPTER 1— Small Groups: Power, Definition, Attraction

Chapter One Overview

Types of Small Groups
The Power of Groups
Defining Small Group Communication
 Transactional Process
 Symbolic Behavior
 Shared Meaning
Why We Join Groups
 Interpersonal Attraction
 Personal Need for Affiliation
 Commitment to Group Goals and Activities
 Assignment by Someone Else
Characteristics and Coordinating Mechanisms of Small Groups
 Interdependence and Interactivity
 Exponential Number of Interactions
 Synergy
 Coordinating Mechanisms
Characteristics of Small Group Communication
 Complex Transactions
 Interactive Complexities
Groups in Organizations
 Organizational Examples
 Meetings
Quality Decision Making through Group Diversity and Ethics
Discussion Questions
Exercises
Test Questions

Chapter One Teaching Objectives

- Introduce the types of groups.
- Describe the power of groups.
- Examine the reasons for joining groups.
- Explain the basis for interpersonal attraction.
- Outline the characteristics and coordination of small groups.
- Explain group synergy.
- Describe characteristics of the small group communication process.
- Demonstrate the role of small groups in organizations.

Chapter One Lecture Outline

Introduction

Wikipedia: = Ward Cunningham and Richard Stallman

Google: = Larry Page and Sergey Brin.

YouTube: Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim.

Few great ventures are started by a single individual alone; Created by people working together. A troupe of actors, a network of friends, a social group, a church congregation, a community, a village, professional colleagues, family relatives, acquaintances in a social networking site, and active blog participants, all form groups.

Show up on time. Know your lines. Respect your fellow actor, your director, and yourself. ... When your friends are up for a part, encourage them. When you're in a play, give the other actors the stage when it's theirs; when it's your turn take the stage with gusto—and then give it back to them.... Be yourself: be all the yous you are, but don't let them crowd out the smart one.

(Things I overheard while talking to myself, Alan Alda, 2007).

Alan Alda's comments apply to groups: Show up on time, be prepared, respect yourself and others, participate fully, take turns, and be all that you can be in the group.

Groups and teams are used in every aspect of human activity. Work groups and teams have become a cornerstone in the operation and success of many of today's organizations.

“Teamwork is an essential ingredient on and off the race track” for successful Formula One Racing

- After a near fatal car accident, Frank Williams, confined to a wheelchair, developed a racing team that has outperformed the other 11 Formula One teams.
- At Suburban Hospital in Bethesda, Maryland, teams reduce errors, shorten the time patients spend in its 12-bed ICU (intensive care unit) and improving communication between families and medical staff and keep team members up to date.
- Miniretek Systems uses teams counterterrorism, criminal justice and the environmental research
- Motorola, Ritz-Carlton Hotels, Boeing, Federal Express, and Texas Instruments all use teams.
-

Types of Small Groups

- Family
- Educational or learning groups.
- **Decision-making and problem-solving groups.**
- Work groups a type of problem-solving group: McDonald's crews to high-level executive retreats.
- Computer-mediated communication conference groups.

The Power of Groups

Disney, Honda, Marriott, Merck, Motorola, Nordstrom, Procter & Gamble, Sony, and Wal-Mart all use groups

“The wisdom of crowds” — collective intelligence, exists in groups of people in the ability “to act collectively to make decisions or solve problems. . . . Groups benefit from members talking to and learning from each other . . . [and can] come up with good solutions to a wide array of problems” (Surowiecki, 2004, p. 7).

Defining a Small Group and Small Group Communication

A collection of **3 to 20** individuals who:

- (a) Are Interdependent

Copyright © 2011, 2008, 2005 Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.

- (b) Influence each other over some period of time
- (c) Share a common goal or purpose
- (d) Assume specialized roles
- (e) Have sense of mutual belonging
- (f) Maintain norms and standards for group membership
- (g) Engage in interactive communication

Small groups best conceived of as network of individuals who interact with each other.

Focus time and attention on a common purpose, goal, and task.

Works together in a group that exists within a network of interacting groups

Network of groups may form a corporation; a civic organization; or a social movement.

Group's purpose and power participated in differentially by group members or egalitarian way

Group members interact with each other to accomplish the group's goals.

Small group communication is the transactional process of using symbolic behavior to achieve shared meaning among group members over time. There are three key concepts in this definition:

transactional, symbolic, and shared meaning.

Transactional—all group members simultaneously send and receive both verbal and nonverbal messages. No one can *not* communicate

Symbolic Behavior—the meanings of verbal and nonverbal communication exist in the symbolic significance we attribute to the words and the nonverbal behaviors. The meanings exist in individuals, not in the words themselves.

Shared Meaning—we each assign different symbolic significance to verbal & nonverbal expressions.

Arriving at common "shared" meanings can be difficult. The development of shared meaning is, however, an essential goal of small group communication, with everyone arriving at a more or less shared understanding of the communication.

Tell a Joke to Illustrate Transactional, Symbolic & Shared aspects:

A man was concerned about his communication with his wife of 34 years. When he told his physician that she was going deaf, the physician suggested that to find out just how deaf she was he should try talking to her when her back was turned. He went home and his wife was at the sink doing dishes. He stood in the kitchen doorway and said "What's for dinner?" but got no response. He took a few steps into the kitchen and repeated the question, "What's for dinner?" in a loud, firm voice, but still got no response. He moved half way across the kitchen and asked again: "What's for dinner?" but heard nothing. Finally, he walked right up behind his wife and said in a loud voice: "What's for dinner?" His wife turned around and said, "For the fourth time, pot roast!"

Finally, they had **transactional** communication (simultaneously sent & received); with **symbolic significance** and **shared meaning**.

Why Join a Group? —People join for different reasons:

Interpersonal Attraction: proximity, similarity, complementarity

Physical proximity—the group is close & convenient

Attitude similarity—group shares similar interests & views

Need complementarity—interpersonal-psychological fit

Need for Affiliation—social contact, meaning, & identity

Commitment to Group Goals & Activities—a cause or interest

Assignment by Someone Else—Supervisor assigns us to group

Characteristics of Small Groups

Interdependent and Interactive—members share common goal, purpose, and are engaged in interactive communication roles.

Exponential Number of **Interactions**—Adding group members exponentially increases number of interactions, creating a more complex decision-making process in number & diversity of relationships

Synergy—working together, sharing ideas with mutual respect, creates an interactive building process & a whole new outcome

Coordinating Mechanisms:

Team Leadership	Coordinate, plan, organize activities; develop team knowledge; assess team performance; build positive team atmosphere; motivate team members
Mutual performance Monitoring	Develop common understandings, identify mistakes, monitor team performance, provide feedback to facilitate correction
Backup Procedures	Anticipate team members' needs through accurate knowledge of responsibilities; recognize potential workload distribution problems; shift workload among members to achieve balance
Adaptability	Adjust strategies based on feedback information; identify cues that change has occurred; provide reallocation of resources; alter action in response to changing conditions; remain vigilant to changes in environment
Team Orientation	Take other's behavior into account during group interaction; belief in importance of team goal; consider alternative solutions provided by teammates
Shared Mental Models	A shared knowledge of the relationships among the task team members will engage in and how the team members will interact; anticipating each other's needs; identify changes in team or task and adjust strategies
Mutual trust	A shared belief that team members will perform their roles and protect the interests of their teammates; willingness to admit mistakes and accept feedback
Closed loop Communication	Exchanging messages and follow-up, acknowledging a message has been received and clarifying its meaning as intended

Characteristics of Small Group Communication

Complex Transactions of **Substance, Pattern, Process**

Substance: the content issues of group interaction

Pattern: the relationships, interactions of group members

Process: the action, catalyst for group interaction

Interactive Complexities—small groups depend on the interaction among people with different points of view and the ability of those people to hear and incorporate the multiplicity of ideas

Types of Small Groups—primary (family), social, casual, educational, decision-making and problem-solving, work groups such as Quality Circles and self-managing teams, computer mediated and videoconferencing groups.

Types of Groups in Organizations—brainstorming, committees, task forces, and other work groups
Ford and Saturn Examples from the Automotive Industry

Organizational Examples- Wholefoods, Seagate Technology, and Nucor

Meetings- Organizations hold a large number of meetings with carried success. Fig. 1.3 pokes fun at meetings and Fig. 1.4 provides a guide to meeting effectiveness. This guide is placed early in the text to increase group effectiveness.

Quality Decision Making through Group Diversity and Ethics

Diversity among the members of a group is important for the quality of the group's decisions. Standards of moral conduct underlie all group and team activities. The guidelines provide important opportunities to discuss the role of ethics in groups and teams.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the basic characteristics of a small group? How is a small group different from a group of friends gathering after a ball game or several members of an office getting together for lunch?
2. List three to five groups to which you have belonged in the past few years. Did you join because of
A. Interpersonal attraction? Was it primarily physical proximity, attitude similarity, or need complementarity?
B. A need for affiliation?
C. A commitment to group goals and activities?
D. Assignment by someone else?
Which group(s) did you enjoy the most? Which group(s) did you find most gratifying in terms of accomplishing goals? Which group(s) were least satisfying? Least successful?
3. Provide an example of the (a) transactional, (b) symbolic, and (c) shared meaning aspects of small group communication. How do these examples help you understand the communication process in small groups?
4. Discuss what is meant by the statement that the "whole of the group is greater than the sum of its parts"? Provide an example of this phenomenon from your own small group experiences.
5. There are numerous types of small groups, including primary, social, educational, therapeutic, problem-solving, work, conference, and computer-mediated communication groups. Have you participated in any such groups? Which ones? Which ones are you most familiar with? How do they differ from the ones you are least familiar with? When looking at the different types of groups, can you identify specific areas of interest to focus your study of small groups? What are they?
6. From your work experience, can you identify a small group success story? Do you have an example of when a small group was not successful on the job? What were the primary differences between the two groups?

Chapter One Exercise Instructions and Answers

1. Icebreaker: What interests other class members?
2. The value of groups: Increasing information and insights.
3. Learning about effective groups and teams: Are you lonely? Hold a meeting!
4. Horse trading: A test of individual versus group decision making.
5. Inventing the light bulb.