**Module 6 Understanding work group dynamics and group based problem-solving**

**What Is a ‘Group within the Organization?**

A work group is defined as two or more employees who 1) interact with each other, 2) perceive themselves as sharing several common interests or goals and 3) come together or are brought together to accomplish a meaningful organizational activity. These groups have the specific characteristics of 1) two or more members, 2) prescribed interaction patterns, 3) purpose(s) stated in meaningful organizational terms and 4) members who are aware of the formal group’s existence and their involvement in it.

**Informal group** - employees who come together voluntarily for a common purpose- may or more may not be work related. Managers do not always encourage informal group as they believe that group may develop goals not consistent with the ORG goals. Can function as whistle blowers.

**Project teams and effective organizations** – 1. The life span of team is short. 2. Membership is always voluntary. 3. Project team pulled together quickly with out formal selection 4. Follow-up is swift 5. Support staff is not assigned to the project team. 6. Communication and project documentation are informal. Do not leave paper trails.

Why individuals are attracted to join groups: individual belied that membership creates a pathway to satisfaction of important needs. The more individual needs group satisfies the more important the group will be.



Interpersonal – members share similar and highly desirable characteristics.

**Work group composition, cohesiveness and norms: group composition** is known as degree of similarity or difference among members of a group. **Composition** may be homo (similar qualities) or heterogeneous (differ in characteristics). Heterogeneous is a prime support of high quality group decision making as it creates more conflicts and increases the group’s potential for problem solving capacity. **Cohesiveness**: Important result of group composition. Defined as 1. Attraction to the group. 2. High morale by members 3. Strong coordination of member effort.

**Can managers influence causes of cohesiveness** - Managers can raise cohesiveness by controlling work group composition. Work group size is also a factor in cohesiveness and performance. Managers can also clarify group goals and activities. Manager must establish ground rules for handling interpersonal conflict. Create the group perception of common enemy. Carefully timing positive feedback. Cohesive groups have a history of satisfying member’s needs in areas of inclusion, stress, self esteem and personal anxiety reduction. While these are important their presence does not ensure group will be high performing.

**Relationship between cohesiveness and performance** – three conditions influence whether work groups will be high performance 1. Level of cohesiveness, 2. Performance goals set by group. 3. Degree of agreement between group and ORG goals.

**What managers need to know about work group norms** – norms are group’s standards for member behavior. Common properties of norms. 1. Norms streamline and summarize the influence process. 2. Apply to member behavior not their thoughts 3. Norms develop for those behavior which influence levels of member effort and group goals. 4. Develop over time ad are resistant to change. 5. Some have more rights to deviate than others.

**Groupthink** – Most often caused by leader who are autocratic and charismatic. When a work groups critical thinking process is suspended because of high cohesiveness and conformity. Indicators of groupthink 1. Illusion of vulnerability (believe success can be achieved easily) 2. Collective rationalization (groups believes it can not fail) 3. mind guards (eliminate unwanted negative external information) 4. Belief in the inherent morality of the group (may conclude wrongly that decision is moral) 5. negative stereotyping of the opposition (may characterize opposition as dull, stupid, confused) 6. direct pressure applied to dissenters (if one disagrees pressure is applied to bring back on line) 7. self censorship (don’t want to rock the boat) 8. illusion of unanimity (mistakes silence as agreement)

Safeguards from Group think – 1. leader must assign the role of critical evaluator to member son a rotating basis. 2. idea generation should be separate from idea evaluation. 3. leader may have sub groups arrive at own decisions before polling entire group. 4. outside experts may provide guidance. 5. second chance meetings should be held.

**Significant aspects of work group structure** – arrangement of roles and positions within the group. **Positional status** – rank of a position in the work group. **Personal status** – rank standing or prestige of the individual in the work group. **Group Size** - # of important individuals. As size increases face to face contact decreases. Some members may be reluctant to voice opinions – because of this implicit assumption of equal participation does not hold as work groups grow larger. . As size increases members exhibit 1. less agreement 2. more dislike for each other 3. less tension 4. greater release of tension.



WORK group development and decision making - stages of group development.

**Forming** – move from personal to group focus. Identify behaviors most important to group. Assess skills, abilities, and experiences of members. Discuss goals and motives. Assess degree of commitment and involvement of members. Test each others assumptions about hard work and cooperation. May have leadership turbulence. Several people may aspire to be group leader

**Storming** - . conflict emerges. Members become more assertive. Dissatisfaction with the current leader may surface and leader may be replaced. These disagreements are necessary to create a basis for trust and collaboration.

**Norming** – as interpersonal conflicts subside group enters stage 3. members are thoroughly aware of their involvement and commitment. Believe benefits of membership outweigh costs. Leadership position is established and stable. group has hierarchy of roles. Harmony and agreement in the group. Group think may occur. External threat may trigger solidarity.

**Performing** - actual performance is close to potential performance. Willingness to Confront conflicts. members feel empowered and resolved conflict by collaboration. Mature group confident about their abilities. Quickly attack evidence of process losses. **Anyone** can voice concern about process losses.

It is not a good idea for a group to remain in stage 4.



**Brainstorming** –technique for idea generation not evaluation. separation of idea generation from idea evaluation. Principle of deferred judgment. steps – 1. assemble team – appoint a leader. 2. explain focus of group. 3. set a time limit. 4. select recording method. 5. review rules for brainstorming.

**NGT – nominal group technique** – minimizes verbal interaction amongst members. Highly structured. 1. question is posted. And members silently generate ideas. 2. leader goes around and asks each member to read one idea. 3. each idea is recorded in the order. 4. each member records and ranks the ides on a 3x5 card and rates from 1 – n. 5. voting patterns can be analyzed. 6 a final vote is taken .**Positives-** idea generation is separated. Balanced participation occurs. Ensures a systematic movement towards a preferred outcome. It is time efficient. **Negatives** – highly formalized. Repeated use can lead members to a perception of “ritualistic decision making”. Creative benefit can be neutralized id used too often.

**Delphi –** when members can not attend a meeting. Members may not know other members. Requires central coordination. 1. each member anonymously records comments. 2. all data in step 1 is sent to a central location. 3. each member receives a copy of all second round feedback. 5. step 3 and 4 are repeated as many times as required. Delphi group eliminate the effects of dominant personalities.

When members define work method, plan schedules, or assess service or product quality the group is working on task activity. Maintenance activities nurture and sustain the emotional qualities. I.e. Member satisfaction, well being, cohesiveness, When a group reached stage 4 maintenance and task activities can be delegated to members.

**To minimize process losses** 1. define work groups task or problem carefully. 2. do not jump to idea evaluation. 3. Avoid groupthink 4. Make valued rewards contingent on high-quality group performance. 5. make group level rewards contingent on group’s contribution to work unit success.

**Managing intergroup behavior and performance** – Intergroup behavior occurs when 2 or more groups have interaction requirements. 1. Interdependence (frequency and quality of interactions), 2. information flow (amount, quality, timing). 3. integration.

Pathways of effective communication - Rules and procedures. Member exchange (temporarily assign member to another group). Linking roles (formally creating a position to coordinate work of 2 or more groups). Task forces (group based. Temporary. Decoupling (fast decision-making or security or severe conflict – may be necessary to separate groups)

**Social Loafing** – why 1. equity of effort (other are goofing why shouldn’t I) 2. loss of personal responsibility (large group no one will miss me) 3. reduced effort caused by reward sharing (everyone is paid the same so why should I do more work) 4. coordination complexity in large groups. (there are so many of us that we are getting under each others feet). **How to minimize social loafing** – 1. focus on interesting and important aspects of tasks. 2. assure members that their individual performance is identifiable and significant. 3. tell members they should not tolerate inadequate performance from group members. 4. performance evaluation 5. some portion of rewards is dependant on their performance.

**Decision Making –** decision maker should select the method that best fit the problem.

AI – manager makes the decision alone – boss style

AII – Manager seeks information then makes decision.

CI – manager explains problem in one to one. Takes decision which may or may not reflect ideas of subordinate.

CII – explains problem in group format. Takes decision which may or may not reflect ideas of group

GII – explains problem – the group makes decision.

**Conflict –** two views 1. Conflict is always dysfunctional and unhealthy. 2. conflict is a by-product of organizational life and is unavoidable but manageable.

First view is the **traditional view** – encourages suppression. Solutions often become similar. Conflict is usually experiences as destructive and it produces negative results. **Contemporary view** – conflict can be useful deviation from the status quo. Conflict can be destructive and constructive.

Managing conflicts within and between groups –

Avoiding (avoids confrontation – prevented from coming out in the open)

Accommodating – letting other have their way. Self sacrifice.

Forcing – using power, coercion, or pressure to impose a solution through intimidation.

Compromising – negotiating to reach a mutually acceptable solution.

Collaboration – needs of both parties are integrated to solve a problem permanently. Steps 1. define the problem share the facts. . 2. state the problem in specific terms. 3. focus on the facts. 4. conduct non-judgmental discussion. 5. collaborate on alternatives. 6. develop criteria for measuring the quality and acceptability. 7. define all agreements as tentative until all conflicts are addressed. And no implementation till both parties is convinced.

Summary Points

* A group is a collection of two or more employees who interact, perceive common interests or goals and are brought together to accomplish a meaningful organizational activity.
* Organizations have formal task or command groups and informal friendship groups. Generally speaking, informal groups emerge because formal groups cannot satisfy all their members’ needs.
* Project teams have specific purposes to be accomplished in short time periods. Once goals are accomplished, project teams are disbanded.
* People join groups and organizations because of interpersonal attraction created by proximity, physical attractiveness, attitude similarity, demographic similarity, group activities and group goals.
* Work group composition refers to the degree of similarity or difference between members’ personal qualities. When members share a number of characteristics, the work group is said to be homogeneous. When members have little in common, the group is heterogeneous.
* Cohesiveness is a property of groups which means that members value the benefits of membership highly. Cohesiveness will be positively related to performance if the work group’s performance norms agree with the performance norm of the organization. Managers can influence cohesiveness by controlling composition, size, clarity of goals and activities and disturbances, creating a common enemy and using positive feedback about performance.
* Work group norms streamline the process for controlling member behavior. Without norms, a group would have to deal with each example of behavior as a discrete event.
* When work groups are cohesive and they have well developed norms, conformity can be high. Conformity occurs when members consciously adjust their behavior to the work group’s norms.
* If conformity and cohesiveness are extremely high, a work group may exhibit groupthink. This is the suspension of critical thinking in the group. Groupthink symptoms are detectable and correctable. Groupthink need not always result in bad decisions. Often a work group will exhibit groupthink but possess enough information to reach a correct decision.
* Positional status refers to the rank of a position in a work group’s hierarchy. This form of status attaches to the position and not it’s incumbent. Personal status is the rank or standing of the individual in the work group. Both positional status and personal status are reflected by status symbols bestowed by the organization.
* Work group size has predictable effects on member participation, satisfaction with membership, process losses and average performance per member.
* Work group development proceeds through four stages: 1) forming, 2) storming, 3) norming and 4) performing. Each stage has identifiable issues which must be resolved before the group can progress to the next stage.
* Work groups cannot stay in stage 4 indefinitely. Turnover of membership and changes in the group’s task eventually dislodge the group from this stage. Managers must recognize and manage these forces to ensure organizational renewal and transmission of organizational culture from one generation of employees to the next.
* Groups make risky decisions based on how members value risk and the organization’s expectations that given groups should be risk tolerant or risk averse.
* Work group creativity can be low if the manager fails to follow a creative decision process, does not separate idea generation from idea evaluation in group decision-making and does not teach the group how to take ownership for creative ideas.
* Brainstorming in work groups defers judgment about the quality of suggestions and focuses exclusively on generating as many suggestions as possible in a set time period.
* The nominal group technique (NGT) formalizes face-to-face interactions in work groups to minimize the effects of status and to manage member participation in decision-making. While the procedure is ritualistic, it can result in better group decisions.
* The Delphi technique can be used for large-scale policy decisions where anonymity of group members is a prerequisite for effective decision-making. While it is costly and time-consuming, The Delphi technique does produce decisions which are superior to those produced by conventional face-to-face decision-making groups.
* The effective group leader must judge when task activities or maintenance activities are of greater concern to the group. The skills which facilitate group relations in these two areas can be learned.
* Process losses can be minimized by: 1) careful definition of the group’s task, 2) separation of idea generation from idea evaluation, 3) avoidance of groupthink, 4) making group rewards contingent on group performance and 5) making group rewards contingent on group contributions to work unit successes.
* Managing intergroup behavior and performance requires the manager to assess groups’ need for interdependence, information flow and integration. Depending on needs in these three areas, managers can choose among the following to improve intergroup behavior and performance: 1) rules and procedures, 2) member exchange, 3) linking roles, 4) taskforces and 5) decoupling.
* Social loafing is the decline in average member performance in groups of increasing size. Social loafing can be reduced if a manager focuses on maintaining high job involvement, preserving group performance norms and reinforcing the importance of the group’s performance goals.
* The extent of group participation in decision-making can be determined by diagnosing the group decision-making situation. The key considerations in the diagnosis are: 1) the time pressure to make the decision; 2) the importance of decision quality; 3) the importance of subordinates’ commitment to the decision; and 4) the extent to which information is available to make the decision. The actual amount of group participation in decision-making varies from none (bosscentred decision-making) to considerable (full groupcentred decision-making).
* When group conflict is viewed as a natural process which can be managed in the organization, the contemporary view exists. If conflict is viewed as always being destructive and injurious to harmony this is the traditional view.
* Various methods for managing conflict exist. The manager can select from these strategies: 1) avoiding, 2) accommodating, 3) forcing, 4) compromising and 5) collaborating. The selection of the method rests on the decision maker’s analysis of the situation and his personal preferences for given strategies.