

GROUP DYNAMICS

Objectives

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

1. draw a perspective of group dynamics by understanding its essentials;
2. pinpoint the individual roles that group members can perform—membership and leadership;
3. define and elaborate on the principles of group effectiveness/cohesion;
4. develop group/team skills for problem-solving situations; and
5. understand and appreciate certain personal traits necessary for productive group discussion, especially the Filipino values.

INTRODUCTION

.....To work together, we Filipinos have to learn to trust each other, and to trust each other we have to learn to *communicate* with each other not from our surface selves, but from deep down in our true selves.....

Jaime Bulatao, S.J.

The Family as the smallest group

The smallest unit of society is the family. The Filipino family serves as society's smallest think-tank, critic, initiator, correlator of events, and transmitter of values and traditions. Fundamentally, it is the building block of every society, modern or primitive. If a society is weak, it's because its families are weak; if a society is strong and tenacious, it's because its families are solid. Therefore, the vitality of a country rests upon the *family's relationship system or group dynamics*. Within this basic social structure patterns of communication result in harmony or disharmony, unity or disintegration. Within this miniature state exists certain values, attitudes, and beliefs that lie at the very root of its existence.

If you can visualize society being represented by a progression of concentric circles, the family would be the innermost circle. The family extends its identity and influence to the neighborhood, school, church, barangay/town, and organization or workplace—the outer concentric circles. When members of these circles band together to solve problems of common interest, the community benefits as a whole. When individuals admit to one another of their inadequacy to solve common problems, they begin to pool their unique and respective strengths to figure out solutions to these problems. Likened to our native broom, *walis-tingting*, a group becomes strong when knit or tied together by a common interest or goal.

BASIC HUMAN GOALS: WHY GROUP DYNAMICS?

Bulatao (1965 : 1) sums up under three headings the goals that human beings set for themselves:

1. To understand better the world in which one lives, especially the people in it, and one's relations with them and oneself;
2. To plan a course of action for solving the problems that one encounters; and
3. To act in concert upon this plan, to leave this world better than they found it.

Wisdom or knowledge for its own sake is of intrinsic value. Knowing more about the world and about ourselves is gratifying enough. This is the first goal. The second has to do with things that we can change or improve upon. Filipinos are wont to say, "*Talagang ganyan na iyan!*" in abject surrender. Rather than confront, they take a passive stance where there is little or no conflict. Attitudes and perceptions come into play when individuals work together. The success of a course of action depends upon the attainment of the first two goals. Time expended in understanding a problem is time spent well. Clarity of vision naturally flows into fruitful action. Most importantly, however, self-knowledge precedes action.

What then is group dynamics? Let us look at some useful terms or concepts.

NATURE OF SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

Group dynamics is synonymously referred to as small group communication, group process, group-centered interaction, and group discussion.

Group discussion is defined by Monroe and Ehninger as a “cooperative and relatively systematic process in which a group of persons exchange and evaluate ideas and information in order to understand a subject or solve a problem.” Fr. Jaime Bulatao (1965) calls it “thinking in cooperation with others.” Another psychologist-author (J. W. Pfeiffer, 1973) defines group dynamics as a form of human interaction that deals with “such items as morals, feeling tone, atmosphere, participation, influence, styles of influence, leadership struggles, conflict, competition, cooperation” and so forth. R. Eugene Moran, S.J. (1978) describes group process as the interaction between the relationship issues and the work issues in a group. From these ideas, we could draw a simple basic definition: *Group discussion is a process of cooperative thinking and sharing between three or more persons for the attainment of common interests, needs, or goals.*

PRODUCTIVE THINKING

Thinking is in man’s nature to do but the hardest to do as well. Daydreaming and weaving fantasies are a form of thinking, the less productive kind because they are not anchored on reality. Productive thinking in discussion leads the thinker to ask himself questions like, “Is this true?” “Are my assertions buttressed by experience?” “What are the facts?” “Are there other possible explanations for these facts?”

In many instances, we tend to think carelessly, even loosely, in “capsules” or stereotypes. We say that “fathers know best” or “there are no delinquent children, only delinquent parents.” Lumping together aspects of a problem without careful analysis will lead us to a dead-end. In cooperative thinking, there is a need to validate one’s thinking in light of realistic experience, thus, probing reality further. Sometimes this is called “thinking hard” on a subject or putting reality to the test.

Can mentally ill individuals think? They can but cannot validate their thoughts vis-à-vis reality. But most mentally healthy people are able to modify or change their views in light of others’ experiences. They are able to dialogue with others and by fusing two views create a third, more realistic because it is more broadly based.

SHARED CREATIVITY AND REALISM

Bulatao (1965: 2-3) avers that cooperative thinking taps the group’s potential for *shared creativity and sense of broad realism*. Many fruitful endeavors have emerged from people discovering that others think similarly as they do within their innermost selves; herein arises the desire to act, made firmer because it is rooted on common belief and conviction.

MAIN OBJECTIVES OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

According to Monroe & Ehninger (1974: 90), groups get together to accomplish either one of two main objectives, namely: *a) to exchange or share ideas, information on a subject; b) to arrive at a*

Decision or course of action on a problem or difficulty. Study groups, club meetings, art-enthusiast groups, and others meet to share ideas or information of common interest, thereby growing in knowledge and understanding of certain fields or areas. Action groups or task-oriented groups meet to gather and arrive at a consensus for problem-solving or action implementation.

GROUP EFFECTIVENESS: Collective Strengths

1. Thoroughness

There are occasions when a group decision may take long and thus not be expedient. There are times when a well-informed individual may expeditiously offer a solution to a problem. Or a team of two persons who possess the needed expertise and wealth of experience. But these individuals acting alone or in two's may fail to *consider all aspects of a matter* which action can be carried out by good group interaction and a lively exchange of ideas, experiences, and information.

2. Involvement and loyalty

Moreover, since people acting as a group arrives at a group consensus, they would be more predisposed to implement a decision they helped make. The ensuing results would be satisfying and permanent. A worthy project brought to completion earns accolade for all the team members, thus boosting morale and self-confidence in each one. A *shared goal* inevitably leads to greater involvement of the individuals belonging to the group, and produces in each one a sense of responsibility for the success of the shared goal. And when the cooperative venture brings positive results, every member readily affirms his common identity with said group, or his loyalty to the group.

3. Democratic decision-making

Finally, group process utilizes a more *democratic interaction* than individualized or autocratic decision-making. The individuals feel they have a voice; the need to be consulted before arriving at an important decision boosts participation.

ESSENTIALS FOR EFFECTIVE INTERACTION: The Group and its Individual Members

Monroe and Ehninger (1974: 91) stipulate certain requirements for effective interaction of the group as a whole and for the individual participants as well. However, the underlying principle of group participation is that the individuals must be capable of contributing worthwhile or significant ideas, and the behavior of the group must be such that it will ensure an objective and systematic examination of the subject matter at hand.

Essentials for the Group as a Whole

1. The first prerequisite for fruitful discussion is ***orderliness***. It does not mean formality or rigid adherence to procedure. It implies, however, that a definite and agreeable plan of procedure be followed. Courtesy at all times is an element of orderliness.
2. Second, every member of the group must display a ***cooperative rather than a competitive attitude***. Openness to the views and opinions of others will boost any group process. If there are

disagreements, reasonable compromises must be forged in order to arrive at a decision. Criticism if dealt with constructively and gently would help the group in the right direction. “What can we accomplish if we work together?” “What will happen if we don’t work together?” These are questions every member would do well to ask himself.

3. Third, a group needs a *sense of accomplishment*. To have a sense of accomplishment, a group must have a goal or direction. This is primarily accomplished by posing a simple and impartially phrased open-ended question. With this as a takeoff point, the group can proceed with interest and anticipation. In the interim, a member can interpose running summaries of points and issues discussed so that the group’s progress can be monitored and in order to keep sight of the goal.

Essentials for the Individual Participant

What makes a good member? Can you tell whether an individual participant has been listening or not? One often experiences the situation where the person you’re talking to makes a remark that’s completely off the topic. It is a two-sided affair. You have not been aware that he wasn’t listening; he knows that he has not been listening. A good member should listen at all times for he has to contribute his ideas and views to the group. *A good member builds upon what previous speakers have said* (Bulatao, 1965:15).

Moreover, *the good member makes sure that his co-discussants have heard him and understood his remarks*. He maintains eye contact with the rest to check whether he is coming across or not. He is therefore sensitive to feedback, like any good speaker. Then he makes the necessary move, i.e., explains further; stops.

Finally, according to Monroe and Ehninger (1974:92), *the good member is equipped with a thorough knowledge of the subject to be discussed, has a close acquaintance with the others, and capable of making meaningful contributions to the group*.

Thus, how do we prepare for meaningful participation in a group?

GENERAL PREPARATION FOR SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

How do you ensure that you will contribute your best? Monroe and Ehninger (1974: 93) suggest two fundamental steps. First, you must study and analyze the specific problem to be solved or subject to be explored. Second, you must find out all you can about the other members of the group.

1. Analysis of the Subject or Problem

There is a misconception that persons who participate in small group discussions need not prepare as carefully as for a public speech. The truth is just the contrary. In group communication, you cannot on your own narrow the subject matter or determine the specific purpose in advance. You cannot foretell the group’s direction either. So, in order to have broader, readier, and more recent knowledge of the problem to be tackled, make the following analysis:

- a) Review the facts/information you have at hand. Go over this information and organize it mentally.
- b) Make your knowledge current or updated. Are there trends or changes affecting the situation?
- c) Fit or reorganize this recent information into what you already know.
- d) Formulate a tentative point of view on each of the important issues. Plan your stance; make up

your mind what your attitude will be.

- e) Anticipate the effect of your ideas or proposals on other members of the group, or the organization of which the group is a part. Be ready to consider all other views.

2. Analysis of the Group's Authority and Constituency

If a group wields authority or power to act on a decision, the group acquires more leverage in considering its options. Maximization of the results of a decision is also ensured because of a group's range of authority. If a group has official status or power, it follows that it has resources at its command and the probability of implementation is great.

In order to analyze a group's constituency, you will need to know a profile of each of the individuals who compose it—status, beliefs, attitudes, profession/work, personality, expertise, competencies, and so on. Knowing such individuals as much as possible will prepare you to contribute maximally, or to adjust to each of them. You may even take on the responsibility of a leader or facilitator.

THE ROLE OF A LEADER

What is a leader? Take away that black-clad maestro with the baton and what will musicians play like? They may be able to play some music together but the orchestra will not reach the heights of creativity. In the same vein, a group without a discussion leader will function with less than the desired efficiency.

1. His neutral role is not to take sides.

His job is to ask the question, not to answer. As leader, he does not know the answer but trusts the group to arrive at the answer. The rare exception is when he has information that no one else has. He may then state these facts as a resource person would and return to his task.

The leader is impartial, never taking sides in any controversy. His task is to clarify, to objectify, at times to pacify members in heated exchange, but he himself remains neutral. He withholds praise or condemnation, thanking and encouraging instead the members for their contribution. He himself does not judge but summarizes issues and points while throwing them back to the group for their assessment.

2. His positive task is orderly interaction.

Orderly discussion is goal-directed, which means it is neither free-wheeling nor desultory. There are procedures or steps to be followed to reach the group goal. Like the marshals in a university commencement ceremony, a leader directs traffic within the discussion area just like the marshal who leads the movement of candidates towards the grand stage in orderly fashion.

Like a traffic policeman, he makes sure the smaller vehicles can have the right of way when they want it. He gives encouraging signals to the shy ones, waiting for them to muster enough courage to speak up. On the other hand, he firmly but gently dissuades the talkative ones from monopolizing the discussion.

His urgent task is to bring about as soon as possible group interaction. He allows minor digressions to a minimum but steers the group along its proper course. The leader ensures that the group keeps moving forward towards its goal.

3. His main instrument is understanding.

A leader is sensitive to what each member wants to say. When he feels that a remark of one member was not heard or properly understood, he repeats in a louder voice or paraphrases what was said. Such acts may generate encouragement to speak among the shy ones.

He is a pulse-reader, knowing when the group wants to dwell on a point or proceed to the next. He can sense when the group has reached consensus. In all these actions, the leader is the spokesperson or the group's sensible mouthpiece.

His spirit of understanding and acceptance gradually moves into the members, becoming contagious in a healthy way. Members learn by example rather than by words. They begin to understand and accept even the least competent person's contributions. Lastly, the leader by his understanding and acceptance creates security and respect.

THE ROLE OF THE MEMBERS

In a democratic setting, *the group discussion leader does not do the thinking for the group*. He merely coordinates their thinking. The members make the final decision; the leader merely acts as their voice. It is the members, after all, who must take responsibility for their probing or problem-solving efforts and the success thereof. Theirs is the equally difficult task of welding the group together. They think, plan, control, and animate.

Within a group, the members can play different roles, one role at a time. These roles may be classified under three (3) headings, two of which are positive they are group-directed, and a third which is negative because it is self-oriented. These roles according to Fr. Bulatao are:

1. Group-building roles.

These aim to keep the group together and enable the members to work with each other.

- a) **Encourager** – Praises, accepts contributions of others explicitly or implicitly.
- b) **Peacemaker** – Attempts to resolve personal conflicts or disagreements between members; relieves tension through jesting/cracking timely jokes.
- c) **Efficiency expert** – Makes suggestions to solve problems that hinder free functioning of group, i.e., procedures, mechanics, rules.

2. Task-oriented roles.

These are geared to help the group solve the problem presented to it.

- a) **Asker of questions** – Asks information or for opinions, clarifies a statement.
- b) **Information-giver** – Volunteers facts either from his own experience or from reading; encyclopedia-like (information at his fingertips).
- c) **Opinion-giver** – States his belief on a question; attempts to move the group towards the belief.
- d) **Fiscalizer** – Examines an opinion minutely for defects. Disagrees often but objectively.
- e) **Elaborator** – Takes another's statements and explains it further.
- f) **Orienter** – Summarizes others' statements. Summarizes state of the discussion in relation to the goal.

g) **Harmonizer** – Out of diverse opinions, finds a creative solution embracing all.

Imaginative thinker.

h) **Energizer** – Keeps suggesting new ideas, new activities. Attempts to push group forward.

3. **Individualistic roles.**

These aim to satisfy an individual's needs, often neurotic, rather than those of the group; hence they tend to split the group.

a) **Recognition-seeker** – Calls attention to self by loud-talking, griping, or opposing.

b) **Disagreer** – Automatically espouses the other side of the question. Refuses to welcome others' opinions. Stubborn/obstinate.

c) **Aggressor** – Attacks others' persons in subtle ways. Uses ad hominem arguments, acerbic jokes.

d) **Dominator** – Imposes authority, gives orders. Bossy. Manipulates others to his view. Interrupts contributions of others.

e) **Passive listener** – Does nothing, contributes nothing. Noncommittal, uninvolved.

Among the members it is possible to pick out main or distinct roles played by each of them.

▷ **PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP**

Is the leader always a leader in a group discussion? A chairman may fail in his duty to keep the group moving forward in the solution of the problem. Any member when he sees this should take responsibility and initiative to get the group back to its task. The “takeover” should be timed well so as to mobilize group energies towards the main task of solving the problem.

THE RESOURCE PERSON

There are occasions when the group finds itself lacking the proper information or technical knowledge needed to arrive at the solution to a problem. This is the time when the group calls for an expert or technical resource person to supply what is lacking. His role, however, is analogous to an encyclopedia waiting to be removed from its shelf, and returned when it has been consulted. The group members are still responsible for the solution to the problem, not the resource person.

MECHANICS OF AN ORDERLY AGENDA

Now that we know the essentials of group and individual participation as well as the general preparation for small group discussion, let us look at the mechanics of an orderly agenda.

1. **The Discussion Format**

A typical discussion goes through the following steps:

a) **Proposal of a Question** – The question is proposed usually by the leader or chairman.

- b) **Clarification of the Question** – The question is clarified, sharpened, and finally agreed upon by the group.
- c) **Formulation of Tentative Answers** – Debate ensues, while more and more facts are gathered, and opinions are elicited and assimilated by the group. Prevalence of One Answer or Solution. One answer or solution gradually prevails, usually after modification and improvement by the group.
- d) **Arrival at a Consensus** – A summary is made which is given the group's approval.

2. Types of Questions Suitable for Discussion

Some adjectives describe suitable topics for group discussion, like the following: familiar, down-to-earth, realistic, relevant, experiential, observable, not-too-technical, and so on. Not all questions, therefore, are suited for group dynamics. The most suitable questions are those whose answers lie within the members' experience or realm of activities, those involving a weighing of facts which are readily supplied by the members themselves (Bulatao, 1965: 10). Often the best questions are those that concern the group members themselves.

The question will naturally arise from the nature and purpose of the group. A university student council will not stray far from home and will discuss matters like housing for students, tuition increases, academic freedom, cafeteria food, and the like.

A social action group will have a predilection for matters involving opportunities for street children, rehabilitation of drug dependents, and daycare for children of working parents. These are questions within the ambit of their experience and interest.

How does the group come up with a problem or question? One technique is for the group to list down a fairly reasonable number of topics from which unanimity can be obtained. If not, the topic which is preferred by the majority. Another technique is the "*posting of problems*." In this technique the leader poses before the small group the question: What is the main problem faced by this organization? The various problems facing the group will then come out and be listed on the board. Subsequent meetings of the group will choose the priority or most pressing problem of the group.

3. Phrasing the Question

Some rules may help the group in formulating the question for discussion. They are:

- a) **The statement of the problem should encourage freedom of thought.** It should not stifle thinking or imply a solution or suggest alternatives. One does not ask: "Which is better: presidential or parliamentary form of government?" The better question might be "What conditions are conducive to a presidential form of government?" Another question might be "What major factors in the Philippine setting allow for a parliamentary form?"
- b) **The statement of the problem should bring about interaction and even a clash of opinions.** Avoid simply enumerating or listing items. A question like "What is the students' main objection to the STRATPLAN?" generates lively debate because issues come forth and their significances compared.
- c) **The statement of the problem should be brief.** The problem should be stated in a simple, direct question, without elaboration. One question might be "How can culture shock among Filipino overseas workers be minimized?"

4. *Posing the Question*

The discussion leader or chairman usually presents the problem to the group in an “overhead” manner, that is, he aims the question not towards any single person but to the group as a whole. Furthermore, the question is not his but one which everyone has to face.

A pause is generally expected after the question has been posed. This is a time for reflection and consolidation of thoughts among the group members. Silence at this time creates a vacuum to draw the members out (Bulatao, 1965 : 12).

5. *Agreeing upon the Question*

Of crucial importance to success in group discussions is the members’ understanding and acceptance of the question. Usually the first move following the pause after the posing of the question will be a request for clarification of some aspect(s) of the question. The leader throws the question back to the group to form its own understanding of the question. Such demands for clarification, followed by the group’s selection of the aspect under which the question is to be resolved, are the group’s positive attempts to assimilate the question and adapt to its own abilities to answer. The group needs this time to gel the problem and allow the question to sink in (Bulatao, 1965 : 12-13).

To prevent the process from bogging down, in case someone in the group becomes too preoccupied with the proper definitions of terms, the thing to do is agree upon an *operational or working definition*. Since this is realistic and observable, there will be ready acceptance and the group can proceed.

6. *Physical Arrangements*

The physical or external setting is a contributory factor to the success of any group discussion. Hence, it is expedient to consider such aspects as a) atmosphere, b) size of group or cluster, c) seating arrangement, and d) duration or length of discussion (Bulatao, 1965 : 6-13)

a) *Atmosphere* – How should we prepare for a group discussion in such a way as to draw lively participation or maximum interaction? For one, different groups work best at varying levels of formality and informality. All agree that formality to some extent is needed; otherwise the discussion metamorphoses into a conversation. On the other hand, advocates of informality point out the virtues of spontaneity and freedom of expression. The overriding goal, therefore, is to allow room for maximum degree of interpersonal interaction.

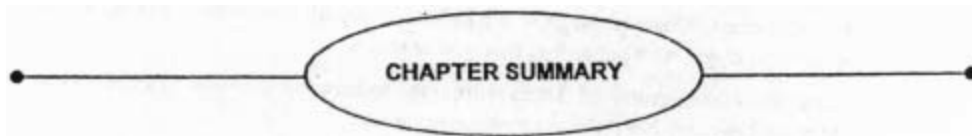
b) *Size of group or cluster* – According to Bulatao (1965 : 6), the Philippine experience generally shows that interaction is maximal when the size is limited to six or eight members (6-8). Beyond this number, it tends to split into sub-groups. Then it is advisable to form a new group. The larger the group becomes, the lesser the individual members’ involvement, lessening their sense of responsibility to contribute to its desired outcome. On the other hand, when there are less than six, there is a tendency for the group to be easily dominated by a single forceful character. Moreover, within smaller numbers chances are that a needed piece of information may not be available. A general rule to follow is the *never-more-than-ten*.

c) *Seating Arrangement* – For conducive group interaction, the circle is the best arrangement since the seats are arranged so that every member sees everyone else’s face. This includes

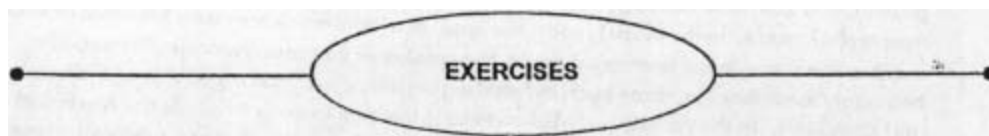
the chairman or discussion leader for he should be on equal terms with the rest. If there are members hiding behind others, care should be taken to invite them gently into the circle. If they persist in distancing themselves, they should be left alone until the discussion warms up and they can be invited again.

Normally, the presence of a table gives more formality to a discussion. But care should be taken so as to make every discussant visible. On the other hand, removing a table and having people sit on chairs or on the floor can do wonders for ease and informality. Lastly, avoid sitting on fixed auditorium chairs that leave no room for flexibility.

d) Duration or Length of the Discussion – Within a small group, an adequate discussion should need a minimum of forty-five minutes and a maximum of about an hour or so. It could go on much longer with those groups that have various subtopics. An upper limit of two hours should suffice. While setting a time limit may kill a discussion at its height, it offers the advantage of ensuring a set time for the members to break up and go home. Moreover, if the members know when to end, they adjust to suit this time limit and can settle things on a tentative basis until the next meeting. But the problem of tardiness has to be tackled in the group's rules and procedures for the conduct of discussion.



The responsibility for the successful outcome of any group discussion lies in the leader utilizing leadership skills and sensibilities that are group-directed, in the individual member who is expected to contribute significantly and meaningfully to the probing or problem-solving process, and in the group members who through a sense of shared responsibility interact, debate, and arrive at a consensus on the question or problem at hand. Respect, openness, trust, knowledgeability on the subject, and flexibility for compromise if needed, are necessary traits for a fruitful group process.



1. Let 5-6 members cluster. Try to even up males and females. Let them engage in conversation on any topic of interest among themselves. Finish in about 15 minutes and present observations on their conversational dynamics. A process-observer is needed to record data.
2. Choose at least two small groups to present in class prior to the graded group discussion. Allot a reasonable time for listening and evaluating the good and weak points of each group. Let the groups choose topics that are timely, relevant, and interesting.
3. Knowing that a suitable question for discussion should be simply, briefly, and objectively stated, frame a question on each of the following subjects suitable for a) a study or learning group and b) for a decision-making or problem-solving group :

College Dropouts among STFAP Recipients

The Philippine Military Modernization Program
Government support for inventors and scientists
Safety features in Cars/Automobiles/Airplanes
Mass Transportation in the Urban Centers of Population
The Growing Squatter Problem in Metro Manila: Boon to Politicians
Major Implications of the CPDP
Major Problems of our Philippine Overseas Contract Workers
 Culture Shock
 Separation from the family
 Language barrier
 Psychological unreadiness
 Worker rights
 Coping mechanisms
Most Common Problems of UP College Students
 Academics-related problems
 Emotional problems
 Monetary problems (economic)
 Psychological adjustments



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