Groups and Teams[1][2]

The study of people working in groups and teams has a rich history. A wide range of fields (including psychology, sociology, political science, communication, and anthropology) have contributed to our knowledge of group behavior. Social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1948, 1951) was one of the first to increase our understanding of group behavior. He used actual group meeting behaviors (e.g. level of talkativeness, amount of resistance to ideas, dealing with ambiguity) as data to help group members understand and improve their own and the group's effectiveness.

Numerous types of groups occur in everyday life; among them are work, therapy, focus, self-help, and virtual groups as well as teams. According to Forsyth (2010), at least two people and three essential components (interdependency, influence, and interaction) are necessary to label a set of individuals a group. A group becomes a team when the group is structured, has defined goals, and requires coordinated interaction (Forsyth, 2010). Teams tend to most often be found in the sports world and the workplace.

Tuckman's (1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) theory of group development --- groups go through five predictable stages called forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning --- has been widely adopted and used to help explain how the group's focus changes over the life of the group. A number of researchers have questioned its universality (e.g. Gersick, 1989; Wheelan, Davidson, & Tilin, 2003), yet it remains influential.

The roles people enact within groups, the unwritten rules (called norms) that often govern group action, and the level of cohesion (defined as attraction to being a group member), that exists within a group are all explanatory factors in our understanding of group and team behavior.

Research has shown that there are two key parts of any group or team's leadership and decision making. Both how group/team members relate to each other and the how group/team members behave in accomplishing their tasks are critical for success. If group/team members are involved in the group's discussion and their ideas are solicited, they will be much more committed to the group/team and its task.

Decision making within groups/teams is another area of heavy research with practical results. We know that groups/teams can make bad decisions, labeled "groupthink" by Janis (1972), due to being too cohesive. Yet decision making can be enhanced when the decision making style (e.g. consensus, consultation) fits the situation (Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 1958; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). Also, a variety of decision making methods have been invented to help overcome typical group/team interaction problems such as overly dominant members or interpersonal conflict. The nominal group technique (Delbecq & Van de Ven, 1971), as an example, allows people to make a group decision through individual generation of ideas, idea aggregation, and ranking of the ideas to make a decision in place of general group discussion and voting.

Recently, Curphy & Hogan (2012) proposed the rocket model of team performance, based on the idea that teams provide the fuel for high performance. In this model, eight factors (context, mission, talent, norms, buy-in, power, morale, results) are essential for teams to perform well. Hackman, a giant in research on teams,

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suggested caution in promoting the use of teams. He found that there are many conditions that are both necessary and essential, yet often missing, for team success (Hackman, 1990; Hackman, 1998).

A continuing trend in organizations is requiring employees to work in teams that result in employees being members of multiple teams with multiple types of formats and relationships. Often, they work in virtual teams where their only connection is through technology. Ensuring employee understanding of the best way to work across cultures, diversity of backgrounds, and technologies is essential to individual performance and engagement, high team performance AND organizational growth and success.

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