

Group Behavior

Dr. Vinod Sharma

Objectives

This unit will help you to understand:

- The nature of interaction between members of a group
- The various types of groups
- The different models of group development
- The importance of group structure
- The various tasks and processes of a group.
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Introduction

The term group can be defined as two or more persons interacting and working together for a common purpose. When people work in groups rather than as individuals, the goals of the organization can be easily achieved. However, working in a group is a complex task. Group dynamics refers to the interactions between the members of a group. A work group of an organization is the main foundation for the social identity of employees in that organization. Hence, performance at work and relationships outside the organization are influenced by the nature of groups in the organization. In this unit, we will discuss the nature and types of groups and the stages in development of groups along with the structure, tasks, and processes of groups.

Nature of Groups

Different types of groups are formed to achieve specific results in organizations. The definition of a group as given by Harold H. Kelley and J.W. Thibaut is "A collection of individuals. The members accept a common task, become interdependent in their performance, and interact with one another to promote its accomplishment." Kurt Lewin popularized the term 'group dynamics' in the 1930s. There are three views on the nature of interaction between members of a group or group dynamics. The first view is the normative view, which describes how to carry out activities and organize a group. According to the second view, group dynamics consists of a set of techniques which include brainstorming, role play, team building, sensitivity training, self-managed teams, and transactional analysis. The third view explains group dynamics from the viewpoint of the internal nature of the groups. The formation of groups, structure, processes, and functioning are discussed in this view along with the effect of groups on individuals, other groups, and the complete organization.

Dynamics of Group Formation

People form groups for various reasons. Different classical theories of groups try to explain why people form groups. The theory of propinquity proposes geographical closeness as the reason. The propinquity theory provides a very basic explanation that people living or working at places located close to one another tend to form groups. But the theory doesn't explain the complexity of group formation. The balance theory says group formation results from the similarity of attitudes and values between people. Individuals with common interests maintain their relationship by a symmetrical balance between their attitudes and common interests. Another theory of group formation is the exchange theory. It proposes reward-cost outcomes of interaction as the reason. There may be several other economic, social, and security reasons for the formation of groups. By becoming members of a group, individuals fulfill their need for affiliation.

Various Types of Groups

There are formal and informal groups in organizations. Various groups exist within the organization and they are of varying degrees of formalization. Groups in organizations are of various types based on the number of members they have and the interactions between them.

Formal Groups

A group formed by the organization to accomplish a specific task is termed as a formal group. The organization sets up a formal group and allocates tasks and responsibilities to different members with the intention of achieving organizational goals. Command groups and task groups are examples of formal groups. A command group is relatively permanent in nature and finds representation in the organization chart. Functional departments of organizations are considered as command groups. Task groups, on the other hand, are formed for a specific task and are temporary in nature. They are dissolved after the task is accomplished. After dissolution of the task group, the members of the task group continue as members of their respective functional departments or command groups with reduced duties.

Informal Groups

Unlike formal groups that are established by the organization, informal groups are formed by the employees themselves. The reasons for the formation of informal groups could be the need for companionship, common interests, growth, recreation, or support. There are two types of informal groups – friendship groups and interest groups. Members of friendship groups have a cordial relationship with each other, common interests and are similar in age, ethnic heritage, views, etc. They like each other's company and want to spend time together. Interest groups are formed to organize an activity and are temporary in nature. Informal groups mainly satisfy the social needs of members.

In addition to formal and informal groups, Fred Luthans classified groups into small and large, primary and secondary, coalitions and reference groups, in-groups and out-groups. Small groups have only a few members who can interact face-to-face, while in large groups, the number of members is high and personal interaction between members low. Primary groups have a few members with similar values and loyalties. Secondary groups have a large number of members with common values and beliefs but they do not often interact because of the large size of the group. Coalitions are created for a particular purpose and do not have a formal structure. Membership groups are groups in which members are registered. Reference groups are groups to which people wish to belong like, for example, a prestigious club. In-groups have members who share values of a society prevalent at a point of time, whereas out-groups have members who do not share those values.

Stages of Group Development

Before the 1960s, it was believed that groups were formed in a specific sequence but it was later realized that they do not follow a standard pattern of development. Established models of group development are the five-stage model and the punctuated equilibrium model.

The Five-Stage Model

According to the five-stage model of group development, all groups pass through the forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning stages. The duration of each stage varies from group to group and some groups do not pass through all the stages. This model became popular in the mid-1960s.

Forming

This is the initial stage of group formation where members try to identify acceptable behavior in a group. The members try to mold their behavior so as to be a part of the group.

Storming

In this stage, disagreements about leadership among members may give rise to other conflicts. By the end of this stage, a relatively clear hierarchy of positions in the group emerges.

Norming

This stage of group development enhances a sense of camaraderie in members through the development of close relationships. A common set of expectations for behavior in the group is the outcome of this stage.

Performing

In this stage, members of the group exhibit committed performance to achieve goals defined in the norming stage. This is the last stage for permanent work groups.

Adjourning

This is the last stage for temporary groups such as task groups or committees formed to accomplish a certain task. After this stage, the groups cease to exist. While some of the members may feel happy about the accomplishments, others may be depressed that they will lose friends after the group disperses.

The effectiveness of groups is supposed to increase through the stages. But this does not always happen and some groups may cease to exist without passing through all the stages while some other may not follow the sequence of stages given in the five stage model. In fact, group effectiveness depends on complex factors.

Stages in Group Development**The Punctuated Equilibrium Model**

As per the punctuated equilibrium model, there are long periods of inactivity combined with brief periods of activity in group formation and its functioning. The periods of activity primarily take place when members realize the time lag and if the project is approaching the deadline. According to this model, the direction for a group is set in the first meeting of the group and is unlikely to change during the first half period of the project. The period of the first half is characterized by inertia. After the first half period, members realize the passage of time and lack

of progress. This leads to intensified activity to complete the project. The direction of group is revised and the group works with a passion to complete the project on time and finish all the required tasks.

The punctuated equilibrium model gives more attention to complexities of group functioning when compared to the five stage model.

Group Structure

The structure of a group shapes the behavior of members and performance as a group. Variables such as formal leadership, roles, norms, group status, group size, and composition of group have an influence on the performance of the group.

Formal Leadership

Work groups can function efficiently under formal leaders like supervisor, project head, or department head. The success or failure of a group depends on the behavior of the leaders, as members tend to imitate and follow them.

Roles

Role is the expected pattern of behavior of an individual in a particular position of society. The employees of an organization play different roles within and outside the organization and understanding their roles helps to understand their behavior. Dimensions such as identity, perception, expectations, and conflict of roles influence the behavior of individuals.

Role identity

Role identity results from attitude and behavior of individuals in different roles. Individuals need to make the necessary changes in behavior to suit the requirements of an organization. Changes like promotions, demotions, or any other changes in organizations require individuals to identify with the new roles and change and re-change their behavior accordingly.

Role perception

Role perception is the view of an individual about accepted behavior in a particular role. Employees in an organization perceive and interpret the roles by observing the behavior of other employees.

Role expectations

How an individual is expected to behave in a particular situation is referred to as role expectation. Employees and employers in organizations have different role expectations from each other. A psychological contract existing between employer and employees is an agreement that sets out expectations on the behavior of each party in performing various roles in the organization.

Role conflict

Individuals play different roles in their personal and professional lives. The roles of an individual in the organization may contradict other roles in the organization or with the roles in his/her personal life as the expectations from the roles differ.

Norms

Norms are set standards for behavior of individuals. Norms can be formal or informal in organizations. Formal norms are stated in the manuals of the organization while informal norms are unwritten and are not specific. Informal norms of groups in organizations can sometimes be dysfunctional. Some norms are common to most workgroups and some workgroups have a set of norms specially set for them.

Norms pertaining to performance-related processes

Norms give an indication of the expected performance levels of employees. Informal norms of groups influence the performance of employees along with their personal motivation levels.

Appearance norms

Appearance norms include norms to dress up, to appear loyal to the organization along with the group, to be busy, and other formalized and informal norms.

Norms pertaining to informal social arrangements

These norms control the social interactions of people within organizations. They determine the friends that people make within the organization. Lunch groups in organizations are determined by such norms.

Norms that regulate the allocation of resources

These norms direct the allocation of new tools and equipment, assignment of projects, and overtime in organizations.

Norms for groups develop over time and can be after-effects of statements by influential members, important actions of a group and its responses, etc. Individuals need to stick to the norms of the group to be acceptable to members. Sometimes, groups can even pressure members to change their behavior.

Status

Status is the rank or social position given to an individual or group by others. It influences the behavior of individuals and motivates them. Organizational titles are used to establish status formally. People with high status in organizations have the liberty to deal with the norms of the organization as per their convenience. If there is a difference between ranking by the organization and the perceived ranking of the employee, disequilibrium in status is created. This leads to corrections in behavior. However, members of groups in general, have the approval of others on the rankings given to them.

Size

The size of a group influences the behavior of the group at large. According to research results, tasks are completed faster by small groups than by large ones but large groups work better to gather diverse opinions of members. Another research finding is about 'social loafing' according to which an individual puts in less effort when working with others collectively in a group as time gets wasted in socializing. Social loafing may also result when the employee observes that other members of group are lazy and so puts in reduced effort too. If measures for individual performance do not exist, members may not work to increase productivity as the efforts would be counted for the group as a whole.

Composition

Many group activities have a need for diverse skill sets. If the members of a group have different skills and knowledge levels, they can all work together effectively. Many researches have also proved that even if conflicts arise due to the diverse composition of groups, the performance is good. Demographic factors such as age, gender, educational level, race, etc. influence the performance of a group. People stay together in groups if they have common attributes; otherwise, they prefer to leave the groups as difficulties in communication and /or struggle for power or other conflicts may arise. Therefore, the composition of the group should be balanced so as to reduce the negative effects of diversity.

Group Tasks

The complexity and interdependence in the tasks of a group influence the performance of the group. When the tasks are complex, the members of a group need to discuss things with each other and share ideas to work better. If the tasks are interdependent, there will be interactions

between members of a group. Generally, groups can perform efficiently by reducing conflicts and improving communication. When the tasks of a group are highly uncertain i.e., if the tasks are complex and interdependent, the effectiveness of group performance depends on the quality of communication in the group.

Group Processes

To understand group behavior, group processes such as communication patterns, power dynamics, behavior of the leader, conflict within the group, etc. should be understood clearly. The social loafing concept explains the differences in the performance of groups. Group processes should promote synergy wherein the performance of the group is more than the sum of individual performances. The 'social facilitation effect' has an influence on performance of groups. According to this, there is a difference in the performance of individuals when tasks are performed in private and when performed in front of others. The group processes can be effective if the tasks are planned according to the comfort levels of people.

Summary

- Workgroups are the basic resource for the social identity of people. The group's behavior has an impact on its members' performance at work and their behavior in life.
- Groups are of varied nature such as formal and informal. There are many theories proposing the reasons for group formation. Propinquity theory, exchange theory, and other theories give different reasons for the formation of groups.
- Stages in group formation are explained through two models for group development. They are the five stage model and the punctuated equilibrium model.
- The structure of a group helps in understanding the behavior of its members. Variables such as formal leadership, roles, norms, group status, size and composition affect the functioning of groups.
- Group tasks are characterized by levels of complexity and interdependence. Processes which go on in a group are communication, behavior of the leader, conflict, and power dynamics. They have an influence on group behavior.

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