



ECSU Student Center and Student Activities Office *Co-curricular education for student organizational leadership*

GROUP DYNAMICS

Being aware of behaviors--both good and bad--and noting them as they appear in your various members can go a long way in helping you structure your organization to most effectively meet the goals you have set. Much of the success or failure an organization experiences is directly attributable to the persons involved. Make sure you make the best use of your people.

GOAL CENTERED ROLES

Goal centered roles or task functions are behaviors that are concerned with getting the group's job done. It is not unusual for a member to exhibit several different kinds of productive behavior in the group. Following are the most desirable behaviors within an organization:

- ◆ **Initiating** - proposing new ideas, suggesting different procedures, attempting novel projects or activities, identifying and defining unique problems, or developing better evaluation techniques.
- ◆ **Contributing** - actions similar to those described above, except they need not be new or novel. It can be an old idea that was useful and can be again!
- ◆ **Information Seeking** - asking for additional data to help the group reach the goal or solve the problem.
- ◆ **Information Giving** - providing relevant facts and authoritative information when needed either in response to questions or a suggestion for more information.
- ◆ **Opinion Seeking** - requesting the expression of group members' thinking. Different from information seeking (fact), opinion seeking concerns the clarification of positions and values.
- ◆ **Opinion Giving** - providing expressions of belief or opinion--not facts or information--relevant to the discussion at hand.
- ◆ **Clarifying** - probing for meaning or understanding; asking questions which, when answered, help clear up misunderstandings or confusion, or repeating what a previous speaker has said and possibly elaborating through examples and illustrations.
- ◆ **Coordinating** - pulling together or showing the relationships among various ideas and suggestions; integrating various ideas or opinions offered by two or more members.
- ◆ **Facilitating** - helping the group accomplish its purpose by performing specific tasks such as asking questions to get ideas flowing, distributing copies of the agenda, turning off lights, or running the projector.
- ◆ **Energizing** - prodding the group, stimulating activity, or warning of the need to act while there is still time.
- ◆ **Setting Standards** - aiding the establishment of group goals.
- ◆ **Summarizing** - tying together related ideas; reviewing the position of the group.
- ◆ **Consensus Testing** - checking to find if the group is ready to accept or reject a specific proposal.
- ◆ **Recording** - keeping a written record of the ideas, suggestions, recommendations, feelings, or decisions that have been part of the meeting.
- ◆ **Evaluating** - appraising the value of an idea, suggestion, proposal, project or procedure in terms of the task to be done.

Group centered roles or maintenance functions refer to those actions primarily concerned with maintaining and strengthening interpersonal relationships and a group centered orientation. This dynamic aspect of the group is just as important to the group as the job or task the group has to do. As in the case of the task functions cited above, each

- ◆ person in the group may perform many different roles at different times. These behaviors include:
 - ◆ **Encouraging** - being friendly, warm, responsive, or praising another member for his/her contribution. This actually encourages that person and others to become involved.
 - ◆ **Harmonizing** - mediating the differences between group members. When differences become sharp and pointed, there is a need to reduce tension and to move toward reconciliation. Helping others recognize and explore differences is healthy and productive behavior.
 - ◆ **Compromising** - reducing tension by modifying a position previously taken, admitting an error. It is more than coming half-way; it is actually compromising one's own position for the betterment of the group.
 - ◆ **Communication** - results in better exchanges among all members; also known as "gate keeping." This term implies that the communication gate should be open so all members have a chance to participate. More verbal members may need to discipline themselves in order to encourage the less verbal to speak.
 - ◆ **Tension Relieving** - diverting attention from an unpleasant situation to a more pleasant one by changing the subject, cracking a joke, or pointing out humor in the situation.
 - ◆ **Listening** - active listening and reacting to what others are saying will improve any group.
 - ◆ **Observing** - members who look around and react to what they see. Whenever one sees a fellow member doodling, for example, tactfully involve him in more purposeful activity; this will result in more contributions to the group.
 - ◆ **Sensing** - being sensitive and responding to the needs of others.

In every group, there will almost always be some behavior that is not productive; behavior that might be described as individual centered rather than goal centered or group centered. This behavior does not contribute to the success of the project or help build or strengthen the group. The only purpose seems to be a selfish one--to satisfy aggressive, sometimes hostile needs. These behaviors are, obviously, the least desirable and include:

- ◆ **Blocking** - deliberately getting off the topic, citing personal experiences unrelated to the problem, arguing or curtly rejecting the ideas of others, diverting attention away from the task, and insisting that nothing can be done.
- ◆ **Aggressing** - blaming others for own mistakes, attacking the motives of others, or deflating another's ego or self-image.
- ◆ **Withdrawing** - opposite of aggression; doodling, whispering to others, daydreaming, being very formal, refusing to listen, or other acts of non-participation.
- ◆ **Seeking Recognition or Status** - excessive talking, bragging, boasting, and affecting distracting mannerisms or dress.
- ◆ **Dominating** - attempting to take over a group by excessive talking, pulling rank, etc.
- ◆ **Special Pleading** - going all out to get a point across. Violators generally have hidden motives or pet projects. They refer frequently to such terms as "authorities in the field," "grass roots," "the average person," and other cliches just to cloud the issue and to support their point of view.
- ◆ **Distracting** - coming in late to meetings, refusing to get down to business, interrupting others, getting off topic, and whispering constantly.
- ◆ **Manipulating** - attempting to control the group by pulling strings or rank. Manipulating menaces a group, since it tends to divide the group into cliques.
- ◆ **Confessing** - seeking sympathy or pity for personal mistakes, feelings, or beliefs irrelevant to the group task.
- ◆ **Rationalizing** - explaining failure or inadequacy by unjustified excuses.

Recognizing your group dynamics will make you more effective not only as a student leader, but also as an organization. Make the best use of your people and production will be enhanced!

REFERENCE

Adapted from: St. Norbert College, Department of Leadership, Service & Involvement

*Additional resource handouts are available as well as consultation services.
For more information, contact the Student Activities Office in the Student Center at 465-4450.*