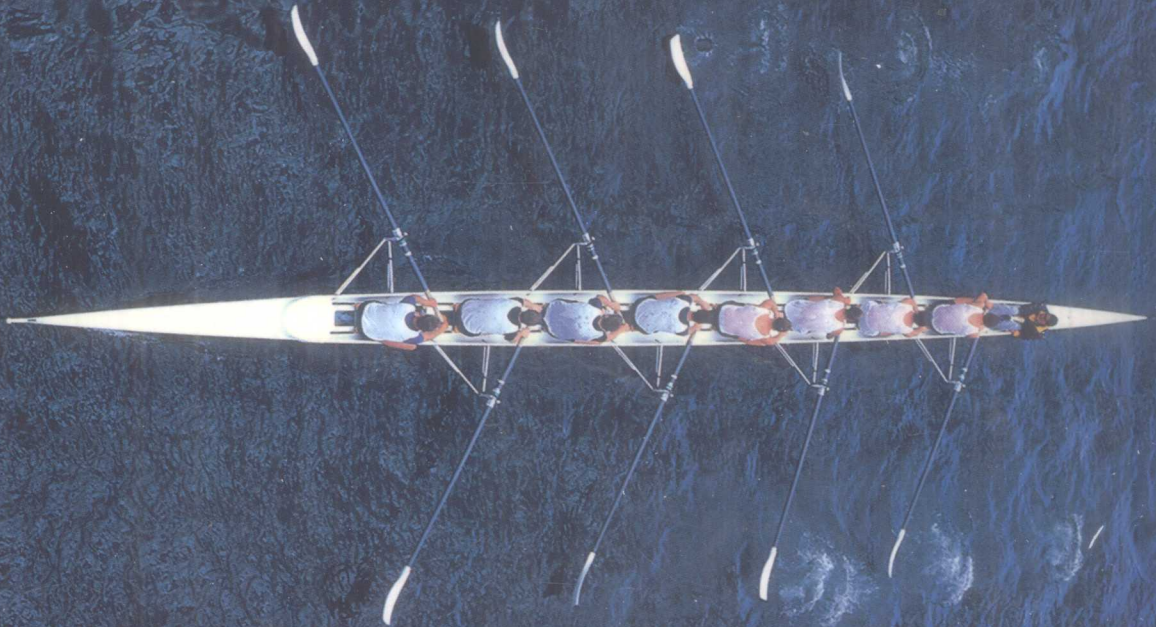


IN MIXED COMPANY

Small Group Communication

FOURTH EDITION



J. Dan Rothwell

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J. Dan Rothwell

Cabrillo College

WADSWORTH


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Preface

In Mixed Company has shown a substantial increase in popularity and acclaim with each successive edition. It has been used by more than 75,000 students at hundreds of colleges and universities. Consequently, for the fourth edition, I have preserved the essence of previous versions.

The central unifying theme, that cooperation in small groups is usually superior to competition, remains and has been expanded somewhat. Many textbooks on small group communication mention the need for and desirability of human cooperation and teamwork. They may even include a few pages on the subject. Such brief treatment, however, can provide no more than a superficial recipe for producing cooperation. Establishing cooperation and teamwork in small groups is a challenging, complex, sophisticated process that, I believe, requires more than a cursory treatment. The history of race relations in the United States, labor/management strife, and the so-called "gender war" make this point apparent. *In Mixed Company* thoroughly addresses the theme of *cooperation in small groups*. Specific instruction supported by extensive research is provided to help students build cooperation. You will not find a more thorough treatment of this essential theme in any small group textbook.

The *communication competence model* continues to guide discussions of key small group concepts and processes. The communication competence model is one of our discipline's unique contributions to understanding and improving human behavior. The model, as before, is thoroughly integrated throughout the text, not merely discussed in the first chapter and then dropped entirely or given only passing mention in later chapters.

Systems theory also remains as a key theoretical component of the text. The mere mention of "theory" can produce glazed looks and slumped posture from some students in introductory courses. Thus, I have made a special effort to explain systems theory in a way that will keep students' bodies upright and their eyelids from slamming shut. I have chosen to concentrate on this primary theory because it provides a framework for analysis and useful insights for students as they participate in group transactions. Offering a laundry list of theories that provide no central focus and may never be mentioned usefully in later chapters seems more burdensome than beneficial in a first small group course.

Finally, an extensive discussion and analysis of power in small groups continues to separate *In Mixed Company* from other textbooks. Power is inherent in all small group transactions. Power is a central underlying element

in small group conflict, teamwork, decision making, problem solving, normative behavior, roles, and leadership. It is perplexing that most small group textbooks give scant attention to the integral role power plays in every group. It isn't that other textbooks never mention power. They just diminish its importance by providing little or no direct focus on the subject. Power thus becomes more an afterthought than an integral small group concept.

Although I have maintained the essence of previous versions of *In Mixed Company*, this fourth edition goes far beyond mere cosmetic changes. The key revisions made in this edition consist of the following:

1. All chapters have been thoroughly *updated*. One hundred and fifty-five references, all dated in the 1990s or the year 2000, have been added and numerous examples and many older references have been replaced with more current ones.
2. "*Closer Look*" segments, a critically acclaimed feature of the previous three editions, have been updated where warranted. A few have been deleted. I have also added five new Closer Looks. They discuss high school cliques, leadership and teambuilding, contrasting leadership styles, technology and the bias of speed, and Murphy's Law.
3. *Gender*, a subject that received considerable attention in the third edition, gains additional coverage with updated and expanded "Focus on Gender" segments. These segments are in addition to the numerous shorter, less-detailed references to gender already integrated throughout the text.
4. *Culture*, a subject that also received considerable focus in the third edition, is given even greater attention. I have organized extensive discussions of culture and ethnicity issues into nine "Focus on Culture" segments distributed across most chapters. Focus on Culture segments are in addition to the numerous shorter, less-detailed references to culture-related discussions integrated into all chapters.
5. *Ethics*, a subject given moderate emphasis in the third edition, has become a more central and important topic. Ethics has been incorporated directly into the communication competence model in Chapter One, with applications made in later chapters.
6. *Electronic technology* (e.g., the Internet, electronic brainstorming, electronic meetings, information overload, virtual groups, and technological bias and decision making) receives added emphasis. Integrating this material throughout the text seemed preferable to treating electronic technology in a final chapter where it might become expendable due to time constraints at the end of a term.
7. The treatment of *critical thinking*, previously covered extensively in Chapters Six and Seven and Appendix B, is expanded slightly to incorporate the Internet more completely.
8. A new section on intrinsic and extrinsic *motivation* has been added to the material on rewards as a power resource (Chapter Eight).
9. At the request of several reviewers, material on *listening* (Chapter Four), *anger management* (Chapter Ten), and *verbal and nonverbal communication* has been added or expanded. Some small group textbooks provide a separate chapter on one or more of these subjects. Such an approach is certainly defensible, but it is

not one that I prefer. I prefer instead to keep the focus of this textbook squarely on small group communication, not drift into more general communication discussions, so I have blended these subjects into the appropriate small group concepts and processes.

10. *Maintaining reader interest* has always been a paramount concern of mine. I continue to look for ways to boost the readability of *In Mixed Company*. With the impressive increase in research and knowledge on group communication, it would be easy to expand *In Mixed Company* into a bloated textbook the size of the New York City phone book. Since a small group text of such prodigious size, however, would probably read about as interestingly as a phone book, I have instead worked hard to streamline, not expand this text. Thus, I have removed redundant material, excised excessive detail, shortened chapters, and replaced commonplace examples with sharper, more student-relevant illustrations.
11. The size of the *glossary* has been increased significantly. Many terms appear in the glossary for the first time, and definitions for other terms have been made more concise and precise to assist students' comprehension.

For the third edition, the suggestion was made that I write a separate chapter on the influence of gender and culture/ethnicity on small groups. After careful consideration I decided not to follow the advice. I agree with Broome and Fulbright's (1995) viewpoint that a separate chapter does not fully integrate these subjects into discussions of small group process. Since gender and culture are relevant to issues discussed in *every* chapter of this text, integrating discussions of gender and culture into each chapter seems preferable to setting aside such discussions and reserving them for a later chapter. Such integration also reduces redundant references to material previously covered in earlier chapters. All reviewers of the third edition seemed satisfied with my decision, so I have continued integrating material on gender and culture into all ten chapters for this fourth edition.

OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENTS

I have three paramount objectives for students: that the material presented be clear and comprehensible, that the text be pragmatic, and that the text be highly readable. Regarding the first objective—*clarity and comprehension*—I have included an outline prior to each chapter. “Focus Questions” precede most major sections of each chapter to direct your attention to key points. I have integrated hundreds of examples—most of them actual occurrences rather than contrived instances—to illustrate concepts. A number of extended examples discussed in many Closer Look segments will aid your comprehension of the significant concepts discussed in each chapter. I also have included tables, each one called a “Second Look,” that act as succinct summaries of complicated and/or detailed material. I am told by my students that these are very useful when studying for exams. Finally, a glossary of key terms for quick reference appears at the end of the text. Terms that are **boldfaced** in each chapter are included in the glossary.

I have attempted to realize my second objective—*pragmatism*—in a couple of ways. Recognizing that theory helps us understand how groups work but is limited unless it is made practical, I have chosen a wide range of examples and illustrations that show how the theory makes sense in real life. I have not simply described what competent communication is, but have also indicated, step-by-step, how you can become a competent communicator in groups.

My third objective—*readability*—has been no small challenge. There have been times when watching the weather channel seemed preferable to writing another word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph. Nevertheless, the advice of Samuel Johnson cannot be ignored: “What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.” My chief effort has been to write a different kind of textbook—one that might stir interest, not act as a sedative. The risk I run in telling you this, obviously, is that you may respond, “And that’s the best you could do?” Alas, yes. Whatever the shortcomings of this work, I was ever mindful of my audience.

Textbooks are not meant to read like spy thrillers, but they certainly shouldn’t read like instructions for filling out your income tax forms, either. Some textbooks should come with a warning: “Beware! Reading this text may induce a coma.” Unlike calculus, which I have no idea how to make interesting, human communication should be a fascinating subject for most people. I have made a genuine attempt to excite interest in a subject—competent communication in groups—that plays such an integral part in our lives.

Toward this end, I have searched in obvious and not-so-obvious places for the precise example, the amusing illustration, the poignant instance, and the dramatic case to enhance reader enjoyment. I also have attempted to enliven the writing style by incorporating colorful language and lively metaphors that bring interesting images to mind. Finally, where applicable, I have related stories that I hope will invite the reader to turn the pages and become interested in the subject of this textbook. Easily half of the energy I expended on this project was spent on readability.

OBJECTIVES FOR INSTRUCTORS

My objectives for this text are somewhat different for instructors than they are for students. For instructors, my principal objectives are that the text be theoretically and conceptually sound, current, innovative yet user-friendly, and logically organized.

The first objective—*soundness of theory and concept*—has been achieved according to reviewers of all three editions. I appreciate their affirmation and guidance. I was spared a few embarrassments thanks to their conscientious critiques.

The second objective—*currency*—can be demonstrated less subjectively than the first. More than half of the almost 650 references are citations from the 1990s and beyond. I have incorporated many of the latest findings and conclusions from recent research in my discussion of group communication concepts and processes. In all subject areas I have searched energetically for the

very latest research and insights. I have also referred to numerous recent events to illustrate key points.

The third objective—*innovative yet user-friendly*—was no small challenge. I have attempted to achieve this objective in several ways. One way is the use of the “perpendicular pronoun” **I**. I recognize that this is not standard academic practice, yet I feel that first-person singular speaks more directly and personally to students than the more bloodless and oblique style of writing commonly used in textbooks.

A second way is the use of a more *narrative or storytelling style* than is usual in textbook writing. Research (Fernald, 1987) confirms that students prefer the narrative style and benefit greatly from it in both comprehension and recall of information. The Closer Looks, vivid examples, and the personal experiences sewn into the fabric of the text are narrative in nature.

Several activities included in the Instructor’s Manual provide a third way I have attempted to be innovative yet user-friendly. Having tired long ago of using excellent but shopworn group exercises such as “Lost on the Moon” and “Winter Survival,” my colleagues and I have replaced the classic case studies, simulations, and structured experiences with original, and we think better, alternatives. We call your attention especially to the “Group Polarization and Pressure,” “Group Synergy,” “Group Size,” “Abandon Ship,” “Straw Bridge,” and “Power Carnival” exercises as examples of enormously successful classroom-tested original group communication exercises that accompany this text.

One innovative testing feature highlighted in the Instructor’s Manual is the *Cooperative Exam* in both objective and essay form. My colleagues and I have had great success incorporating cooperative learning strategies into the group communication course. A Cooperative Group Examination is one way simultaneously to test students and to apply the text material on building cooperation.

I have also produced a videotape entitled *Working Together*, shot in documentary style, which illustrates several key classroom activities (e.g., “Power Carnival,” “Group Synergy”). This video can serve either as a substitute for having your students do the activities or as a visual guide showing how to conduct these very successful exercises in your class. The videotape is available as an ancillary to the text.

The final objective—*logical organization*—was also a challenge. Since students typically work in groups early in a term, all of the material in the entire textbook is almost immediately relevant to their needs, yet the material cannot be covered usefully in a few short weeks. Thus, some subjects must be covered sooner than others. Although there is no ideal organizational pattern, my schema for the chapter sequence is quite simple. I begin with a theoretical foundation (Chapters One and Two), progress to how groups form and develop (Chapter Three), then proceed to a discussion of how to establish the proper climate for the group to work effectively (Chapter Four). I then explain what roles group members are likely to play (Chapter Five) and discuss decision making/problem solving—the primary work to be performed by most groups, with special focus on critical thinking (Chapters Six and Seven). Finally, I explore in substantial detail the close connection between power and conflict

(Chapters Eight, Nine, and Ten). I can see other ways of organizing this same material, but the order I have chosen works well for me, students seem satisfied with the sequence of topics, and reviewers have praised the organization.

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