

# Group Communication

PROCESS AND ANALYSIS



Joann Keyton

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## Process and Analysis

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# Preface

**Group Communication: Process and Analysis** is a primary text for undergraduate group communication courses. In writing this book, I was motivated by several goals. I wanted to help students

- move toward a better understanding of their own communication in groups and how it either facilitates or hinders group outcomes;
- develop critical thinking skills and apply them to their group interactions;
- develop an analytical framework from which to approach group work;
- learn how to move beyond analysis of group dynamics to fruitful intervention or change;
- learn basic observation and assessment methodologies so they can become active learners rather than passive observers; and
- gain exposure to the literature of group communication as well as the broader interdisciplinary literature on groups.

The text, then, blends skills, theory, and research in an interdisciplinary context. The group communication classroom is particularly well suited to this integrated approach for two reasons. First, a systematic approach to understanding and improving group interactions, strongly supported by theory and research offers students a way to enhance their daily and lifelong experiences in groups. The practical applications of the study of groups are extensive and highly relevant to students. Second, the group communication class is widely sought both by communication majors and by students from other disciplines, who recognize the value of studying groups for their own academic and professional pursuits. This book is specifically designed to address the needs of all students, both in communication and in other disciplines.

## Approach

The title of the book, *Group Communication: Process and Analysis*, speaks to the dynamic quality of group interaction. The text explores group interaction dynamics, the relationship of the individual to the group, and the situation of groups within their larger contexts. The dynamic capacity of groups also means that one group cannot be treated like another. Students must learn to analyze each particular group experience in order to become effective group members.

To provide a foundation for this analysis, Part One uses a systemic perspective, encouraging students to seek out the unique characteristics of a specific group and to identify and analyze the individual-group-organization relationships. Part Two

is based on structuration theory, which encourages students to see how systems and structures within groups are developed and then reproduced by group members. Both perspectives are useful for blending theory and practice.

## Features and Learning Aids

To encourage students to apply principles to their own experiences, each chapter reinforces the balance between informative and analytical approaches by giving new information about groups and then providing cases or examples to explore. The text also speaks to students' experience by providing information about a wide variety of groups—family and social groups, work teams and high-performance work groups, civic and community groups, discussion and decision-making groups. The challenge for instructors in covering such a variety of groups is to find common ground for class discussions, exercises, and evaluation. Again, the text helps by providing a broad range of in-text cases for reflective analysis. Once students learn an analytic technique in the context of one group experience, they can write their own case studies or analyze their own group experiences.

To provide additional help for students learning to analyze group experiences, this text offers four different pedagogical techniques. Each technique asks students to be reflective, pose questions, and seek understanding, but in different ways. “Putting the Pieces Together” boxes call for students to use the five core concepts that comprise the definition of a group as a basis for analyzing and evaluating a particular group. “Think About It” boxes ask students to take a moment to apply information to one of their group experiences. “Group Assessment Technique” boxes provide students with the opportunity to use an assessment technique to study a group case or one of their own experiences. And “Building Analytical Skills” boxes teach students what to analyze, how to analyze, and how to interpret group interactions. In addition to these boxes, transcripts from group interactions are placed throughout the text as examples for analysis to further the student's understanding of what constitutes effective group communication. All of these techniques are aimed at providing students with skills for assessing what is happening in their groups, making sense of their observations in a systematic way, and using that information to make their groups more effective.

Learning aids further reinforce these aims. Each chapter concludes with a summary and a checklist review of the knowledge, skills, and assessment/analytical techniques presented in the chapter. Following these items are discussion questions and exercises, designed to help students extend their understanding of chapter material. Key terms are printed in the text in boldface type and included in a glossary at the end of the book.

With its pedagogical features and learning aids, the text offers instructors flexibility in making classroom assignments. Instructors have opportunities to test students' knowledge, their understanding and application of analytical principles, or their performance of group skills.

## Organization

Chapters 1–7 comprise Part 1, “The Group as a System.” These chapters encourage students to identify, discuss, and analyze groups—what they are, how individual abilities and communication styles influence their dynamics, what could happen if they were approached in alternative ways. Part 1 exposes students to analysis of groups and tasks at both the micro and macro levels.

Chapters 8–11 comprise Part 2 “Meeting Group Challenges.” These chapters identify the specific knowledge and group skills that students need in order to become masterful group members and leaders. Part 2 exposes students to the topics traditionally found in group communication texts, including decision making, problem solving, leadership, and conflict management. Several different approaches to these topics are discussed and compared.

Part 3, “Developing the Group,” distinguishes this text from others. Chapters 12–15 cover analytical group frameworks that will help move students from information-based work to application-based work. Chapters on meeting management, group facilitation and intervention, observing interaction and giving feedback, and group development and evolution will encourage students to become more proactive in taking responsibility for their groups and the outcomes of their groups.

## Supplements

To assist in teaching with *Group Communication*, I have written a detailed instructor’s resource manual. This manual includes the teaching philosophy that was a foundation for this book, syllabus examples for a group communication course, methods of obtaining feedback from students about the course and their learning experiences and expectations, chapter-by-chapter teaching resources and exercises, a chapter-by-chapter test bank with both objective and essay questions, as well as suggestions for term-long group projects.

## Acknowledgments

Perhaps you find it odd that a book about group communication be written by a single author. I can simply tell you that’s not the case. Four groups supported me and helped me see this book through to completion. My first “group” of supporters never came together face-to-face . . . they existed only as a group in my head. But nonetheless, this “group” provided the foundation for how I think about and feel about group communication. Paying off a debt is difficult. But, I would like to think that I’ve done so partially by completing this book. Many ideas presented in this book originated in my classroom experiences with Steven C. Rhodes, Western Michigan University, and Victor D. Wall, then of The Ohio State University. I owe my love of groups to these two men. But before Steve and Vic, I was generously mentored by two others. My high school journalism teacher, Ron Clemons, initiated the spark of learning and writing. My boss at the Federal Reserve Bank of

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