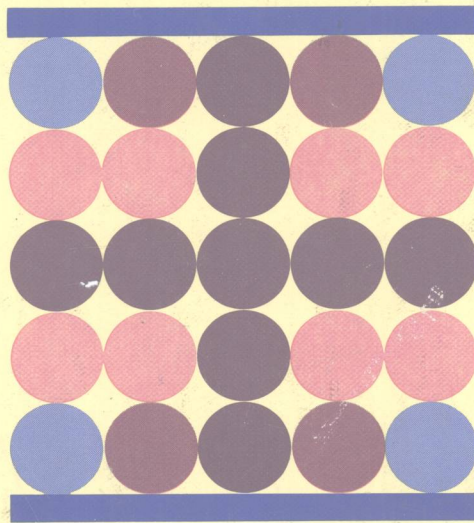


An Introduction to Group Dynamics



DONELSON R. FORSYTH

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DONELSON R. FORSYTH

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

*With a Chapter by Thomas V. McGovern
Virginia Commonwealth University*



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***An Introduction
to Group Dynamics***

Preface

If I had to summarize the purpose of this book in a single statement, it would be *to review theory and research dealing with group processes while demonstrating the relevance of this work in applied settings*. Social scientists in such fields as anthropology, sociology, and psychology have long been interested in the study of groups, and their continued efforts have resulted in the generation of a substantial body of empirically based knowledge. Through the years we have discovered that groups can be many things—fascinating, frightening, complicated, frustrating, provocative, and uninvolved—but whatever their character, groups are always fundamentally relevant to a fuller understanding of social behavior.

A preface is an appropriate place to set forth assumptions and perspectives as well as to admit biases and limitations, so I will begin by explaining my general approach to group processes. *Balance* is a key word, for throughout *An Introduction to Group Dynamics* I have sought to maintain a balanced stance when presenting ideas, evidence, and viewpoints. Although a certain amount of personal bias is perhaps inevitable, from the first page to the last I worked to balance the following aspects of the material:

1. *Theory with research*. Conceptual analyses of group processes are reviewed in depth, but empirical studies that highlight important principles derived from relevant theory are cited to show how theoretical systems are revised through research.
2. *Theory with application*. Group dynamics appeals both to the theoretically-minded basic research scientist and the applications-oriented group practitioner. Although a strong empirical approach is stressed, applications are introduced throughout, and the final three chapters are devoted to studies of groups in industrial, organizational, educational, judiciary, athletic, and therapeutic contexts.

3. *Traditional with contemporary topics.* Classic analyses of groups (leadership, reactions to deviancy, determinants of group performance) are integrated with contemporary topics (deindividuation, groupthink) to achieve an up-to-date yet historically grounded overview of theory and research dealing with groups.
4. *The psychological with the sociological viewpoint.* Studies of group dynamics are being conducted by researchers in a wide variety of fields, including anthropology, speech and communication, political science, business, education, and psychiatry, but the social-psychological viewpoint often predominates. Therefore, whenever possible the text integrates both psychological and sociological perspectives on social-psychological processes to achieve a comprehensive analysis of group behavior.

With respect to organizational aspects, while I tried to examine all aspects of group dynamics in the text, the phrase *an introduction to* in the title is there for a reason. Assuming that this book will be used in a basic course in groups, I was primarily concerned with surveying the major areas in sufficient depth to enable the reader to grasp the essentials. This emphasis on seminal issues sometimes meant that less central, though nonetheless interesting, topics were slighted, but in all instances I concentrated on subjects that have consistently been the focus of theory and research. Also, wherever more detailed analyses are available in major review articles or books, I have referred to these sources and have urged the reader to follow up the text's discussion with the supplementary readings.

Each chapter was written to stand as a single unit; thus, instructors who prefer a sequence of topics other than that reflected in the Contents can assign chapters in a varying order. Also, each chapter consists of a number of independent subsections that examine single aspects of the area but form an integral component of the overall chapter. These subsections were designed to be easily readable in a single sitting. Finally, examples are cited throughout the discussion to help the reader perceive the relevance of the material to everyday situations, and detailed analyses of special topics are included to heighten interest and motivation levels. Every attempt has been made to create a textbook that "teaches" group dynamics, rather than one that simply exposes the student to basic principles and research findings.

Any book, and especially one that examines groups, results from the collective efforts of many individuals who deserve special thanks. Although I alone am responsible for the final contents of the text, Professor Lawrence Wrightsman of the University of Kansas, the consulting editor on the project, vastly improved the final product by sharing his expertise, knowledge, and enthusiasm with me. Professor William Ray Pope of Mary Washington College read virtually the entire manuscript and provided both helpful comments concerning weaknesses and encouragement for strengths. Additional helpful comments were provided by Philip Brickman, of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Rick Crandall, Francis Dane of the State University of New York, Oswego, Sara B. Kiesler, of Carnegie-Mellon University, Charles E. Miller, of Northern Illinois University, and John P. Wilson of Cleveland State University. I would also like to thank Richard Kishur, Nancy Forsyth, and Travis Forsyth for their valuable help, as well as the many students who read, or listened to lectures derived from, earlier drafts of the manuscript. I owe a

special debt of gratitude to my technical consultant, Mrs. Elizabeth Martin, who helped with every phase of the project from preparing preliminary chapters, contacting publishers, and providing encouragement during the “slow” periods, to pointing out inaccuracies and ambiguities, suggesting relevant examples, and preparing the final copy. Judy Anderson’s help with some last minute rush work also proved indispensable, as did the support of the Brooks/Cole editorial staff. Thanks also go to my colleague Tom McGovern for his contribution of Chapter 16.

I would also like to thank the many people who contributed to my intellectual development. First and foremost, I thank Barry Schlenker, my advisor throughout graduate school and beyond, for his many contributions to my training and development. Thanks also to Marv Shaw, my “groups mentor,” for giving me a firm foundation in research and theory on groups, and to Russ Clark for teaching me my first lessons in social psychology. Finally, I acknowledge my debt to the many theorists and researchers whose work has been my subject matter.

Donelson R. Forsyth

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PART ONE

Orientation and Methods

The two chapters in this part introduce the study of groups by building a context for subsequent discussions, explorations, and understandings. In later sections of the book we will see how social scientists, intrigued by the complexities of human interaction in groups, have gained an understanding of why groups come into being, how they evolve, what factors influence their underlying processes, and how they sometimes go astray. However, before we can partake of the fruits of these theoretical and empirical efforts, we must first deal with some basic questions about groups and the methods used to study them. Therefore, in Chapter 1 we begin by clarifying the meaning of the word group and describing the various approaches taken by social scientists who investigate groups. Chapter 2 concludes this brief introduction by comparing several different kinds of research strategies that can be applied to groups.

I

An Introduction to the Study of Groups

The Nature of Groups

Examples

The Mountain

The Decision

The Leader

A Definition

Characteristics

Interaction

Structure

Goals

Groupness

Dynamic Interdependency

The Nature of Group Dynamics

A Definition

Characteristics

A Holistic Approach

Interdisciplinary Character

Diverse Methods of Research

Action-Oriented Research

Basic Issues

An Individual or Group Focus?

Groups: Good or Bad?

Groups over Time: Phases or Stages

Research Topics

Part One: Orientation and Methods

Part Two: Basic Group Processes

Part Three: Social-Influence Processes

Part Four: Problems in Groups

Part Five: Applications

Summary

Daniel Defoe's character Robinson Crusoe was lucky. Cast up on the shore of a tropical island, he alone had survived the wreck of his ship. The climate of the island was comfortable, the food plentiful, and the animals peaceful. He had seed for crops, tools for working, weapons to protect himself, and clothes to cover himself. But Robinson Crusoe was alone. Although he gave thanks for his good fortune in being saved from the sea, he cursed his solitary life, complaining, "I am cast upon a horrible, desolate island; void of all hope of recovery. I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world, to be miserable. I am divided from mankind, a solitary; one banished from human society. I have no soul to speak to or to relieve me" (Defoe, 1908, p. 51). The lucky Robinson Crusoe did not feel very lucky, for he was no longer a member of any human group.

Unlike the unfortunate Crusoe, most of us live out our lives in the midst of groups. People perform so many activities in groups—working, playing, worshipping, learning, eating, traveling, and even sleeping—that it sometimes seems as if groups are everywhere, doing just about anything. To grasp the central role that groups play in social life, imagine a list of everything you do in a typical day from the moment you wake up to the moment you fall asleep. Next, delete from your list all the activities you perform with groups of people and see what is left. Although the length of such a list varies greatly among individuals, chances are that your solitary activities are not very numerous. To rephrase a well-worn saying, human beings are group-oriented animals.

The Nature of Groups

Undeniably, groups occupy a central position in the scheme of social life, but in some respects their pervasiveness is the very factor that prevents us from fully understanding them. In living most of our lives surrounded by groups, in the midst of groups, trying to get into groups, and trying to get out of groups, we can become so accustomed to them that their influence on our behavior goes unnoticed. Therefore, to gain a fresh perspective on groups, let us begin with three examples of individuals surviving, working, and dying in groups.

Examples

THE MOUNTAIN

A Fairchild F-227 was on a chartered flight from Uruguay to Chile when it crashed in the Andes. Although the sky was clear, the pilot had miscalculated his position, and rather than descending for his final landing approach, he was actually flying into an extinct volcano, Tinguiririca. On impact, both wings and the tail