

GROUPS

Theory and Experience

FOURTH EDITION



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Preface

Audience

One of the original reasons for writing *Groups: Theory and Experience* was to bring the literature of group dynamics to life. Until then, readers had to deal with discussions of theory and research and then apply them to real-life situations. This book became a helpful alternative resource in the area of group process by maintaining a rigorous empirical approach combined with a readable and highly personalized format.

Since that early effort, interest in group function has expanded as has the diversity of our readers. The text has been adopted by many university departments covering social psychology, education, communications, speech, social work, business, clinical psychology, and management. While the text continues to attract a diverse readership, it remains focused on the characteristic features found in virtually all groups and uses examples from all walks of life. Organizations and groups that are interested in human relations training, planned change, organizational development, problem solving, leadership, or team development are able to increase both their theoretical understanding and operational effectiveness by using this text as a resource and guide.

Purpose

In this fourth edition we continue our efforts to maintain the necessary balance between theory and research and application. The straightforward integration of theory and experience distinguishes this book from others in the field. Our original assumption that effective work groups can result from the application of learned skills and tested methods is now a firmly established truth.

In the third edition we focused on engaging our readers emotionally and experientially. By adding the individual experiments and reader activities at critical points in the text we challenged students to relate the context to their own lives and apply the basic group dynamic concepts under consideration. The response to these additions has been gratifying and our fourth edition continues this approach.

The end-of-chapter activities offer an extensive variety of simulations, strategies, and exercises. They give our readers tools and approaches to meet challenges and solve problems in their own groups.

Content

We begin by exploring the observable and predictable communication patterns that tend to develop in every group. An awareness of these patterns is crucial for

understanding the group and raising the level of effective interaction among group members. In addition, understanding one's own perception of the group and its members can dramatically improve communications within the group. Thus, perception and communication are the topics of Chapter One.

A second critical aspect for the success of a working group is an understanding of what makes individuals feel as though they belong to the group. One's feeling of belonging is directly related to the amount of cohesion found in a group and the ability of individuals to work effectively together. The concept of membership is explored fully in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three, "Norms, Group Pressures, and Deviancy," is closely related to Chapter Four, "Goals." Because norms can be both constructive and destructive in terms of a group reaching its goals, understanding what norms and goals are, how they develop, and how they can be changed is essential.

Leadership is central to the success of virtually any group. Our premises are that *any* group member can perform leadership functions, that appropriate leadership is determined by the needs of a group, and, because those needs change, so will leadership behavior and strategies. To be successful as a leader demands flexibility of role, a willingness to share authority when appropriate, and an interest in making the most of the resources of other group members, even when this calls for reducing one's own leadership role. Such is the dynamic role of leadership discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Six, "A Systems View of Small Group Behavior," explores the small group as a system, providing the opportunity to view group dynamics from a new and more integrative perspective. It links much of the information concerning issues of maintenance and group process in a holistic and integrative fashion.

A critical aspect of any working group is that of problem solving and decision making. Techniques for improving the problem-solving capabilities of a group and various methods of reducing group conflict and reaching consensus are outlined in Chapter Seven.

In Chapter Eight we look at the use of humor in groups. Humor plays many roles in the life of a group. When deliberately introduced into a group that is defensive or even hostile, humor can reduce tension, provide a more constructive and positive climate, and thus help move a group toward its goals.

The next chapter makes the assumption that meetings represent the opportunity to apply group process skills in practical ways. Thus, we explore what hinders groups and why so many meetings fail, along with solutions to make them more effective. Special attention is given to the concept of design.

Chapter Ten, "The Evolution of Groups," integrates much of the material presented in the earlier chapters by describing the developmental characteristics of working groups. Armed with an understanding of the stages of development, group needs, and the critical events in the life of a group, group members can increase the possibility that they will respond in appropriate and constructive ways and thereby contribute to the group's effectiveness. New attention is given to the family as a small group and the relevance of family therapy to group development.

Finally, in Chapter Eleven, concepts examined earlier in the text—membership, norms, goals, leadership, decision making, and development—are applied to two contemporary group forms: self-help groups and quality circles. These types of small groups have become increasingly popular in recent years. This chapter explores the practical application of group theory to situations which influence many of us at work or in our personal lives.

Features of the New Edition

We have conducted a thorough review of the related professional literature for each chapter and added more than one hundred bibliographic references from the past five years. Dozens of new examples have increased the applicability of the text by adding depth and understanding to the topics being explored. In three significant areas of theory we've expanded or revised major portions of the text to reflect current thinking in the field.

First, we have substantially revised our chapter on leadership by providing a comprehensive overview of leadership development during the past five years and an in-depth exploration of transformational leadership. Examples of effective and ineffective leadership in a variety of organizational settings draw the reader into the practical application of theory and its relation to current research.

Second, the systems view of small groups is important enough to warrant an entire new chapter. Chapter Six examines small group phenomena and increases understanding of group function. Using systems theory, group issues are discussed in terms of the network of relationships between group norms, goals, and communication patterns. The group is addressed as a whole made of dynamic and complexly related parts. Examples from business, industry, the school, and the family reveal the broad applications of the systems view.

Third, the study of the relationship between small group theory and family dynamics has added critical new insights to our understanding of group dynamics. Readers should find this addition to Chapter Ten a possible means of understanding the complexities of their own family dynamics.

Thus, our new edition reflects the most salient work contributed in our field during the past decade as well as its significance in relation to earlier theory and research. We feel that our continued interest in practical application adds a refreshing sense of reality to the discoveries of the past few years.

Acknowledgments

Three people have contributed enormous amounts of energy, counsel, and hard work during the revision. Agnes B. Redrosian provided the highest quality assistance possible. Hong Zhu and Sigrid Burns provided much needed assistance in reviewing vast amounts of new research and Marvin Gershenfeld in his own tireless

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M. K. G.

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