

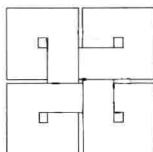
The Handbook for People Meeting with a Purpose

The ZEN OF GROUPS

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The *Z*en of Groups



A Handbook for People Meeting with a Purpose

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Welcome

Welcome to the Zen of Groups.

We acknowledge you, the reader,
for sharing this book with us.

We acknowledge the richness of group life we
have experienced with its many cultural strands.

We acknowledge the opportunities we have had
to work with a great variety of organizational,
community, family, educational and support
groups.

We acknowledge our friends, colleagues and
families for their love and encouragement.

We acknowledge our own commitment to
contribute our experience to others.

We acknowledge the higher purpose of
this book which is to contribute to creating
synergy on the planet.

From our hearts to your heart—enjoy.

Zen

Zen has been described as the inner art and design of the Orient. It was taken from India to China in the sixth century and probably dates back to before Buddhism and Christianity. It has been described as a special teaching without scriptures, beyond words and letters, pointing to the mind-essence of humanity, seeing directly into one's nature, attaining enlightenment. Zen points us towards observing the flowering of our human nature through moment-by-moment consciousness, and our passing through life as a petal falling from a flower.

Zen has been passed down from master to student through direct heart-to-heart experience, with the student always living and meditating close to the master. The Zen practice of being fully awake and in action moment by moment is the essence of group synergy and has inspired us in writing this book.

Fragments of Zen wisdom are to be found in many stories describing self-discoveries of Zen masters and students. Here is one story which illustrates the irony of our writing a book as a way of passing on our experiences of group development.



What Are You Doing? What Are You Saying?

The Zen master Mu-nan had only one successor. His name was Shojū. After Shojū had completed the study of Zen, Mu-nan called him into his room.

"I am getting old," Mu-nan said, "and you are the only one who will carry on my teaching. As my successor, I am giving you a valuable book. It has been passed down from master to master for seven generations. I also have added many points according to my understanding."

"If the book is such an important thing, you had better keep it," Shojū replied. "I received your Zen without writing and am satisfied with it as it is."

"I know that," said Mu-nan. "Even so, this work has been carried from master to master for seven generations, so you may keep it as a symbol of receiving the teaching. Here it is."

The two happened to be talking in front of a fire. The instant Shojū felt the book in his hands he threw it into the flames. He had no desire for possessions.

Mu-nan, who had never been angry before, yelled, "What are you doing?"

Shojū shouted back, "What are you saying?"



Introduction

The purpose of this book

We all belong to groups all our lives. Making the most of being in groups is a valuable life skill. This book comes out of a belief that the effectiveness of all groups can be vastly increased.

The purpose of the book is to alter consciousness about what is possible for groups and to provide access to group synergy. It offers insight into what makes groups work powerfully. It includes a large selection of exercises and techniques to assist your group to move through the processes and stages which will make this possible.

The book is designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of readers involved in organizations, business, community groups, education and recreation. It is written to be accessible to everyone who is part of a work, community, social, family or support group. And it will be useful for all the groups you are in, particularly those of up to 30 people.

The leadership role we explore in depth is that of a facilitator.

How to use this book

This book is designed to be read slowly and thoughtfully. Look for what rings true for you and use your own experience with groups to see what could happen to take those groups you are in to the next stage of development.

We want to challenge your ideas about what can happen in groups, and you can participate in this by taking time to consider the questions under the headings *Thinking Points*. There are no right answers to these questions—the value is in the process of

inquiring. You may like to jot down your own responses to help with your process. The first nine chapters contain the essence of effective work in groups. These are followed by a toolkit of techniques and exercises (tools).

Learning about groups is a bit like learning a new language. Your progress may be slow at times, but then something will drop into place and a whole new area will open up.



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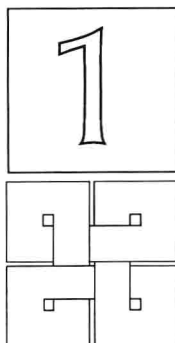
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The Nature of Groups

We're talking about us

The first thing to know about people in groups is that we are talking about us—ordinary humans like our family members, friends and coworkers, and ourselves. This is important to get established right at the beginning.

This book is about the actual experience of being in a group as an active member, not about observing groups from the outside looking in. This book is for those who are already getting their feet wet or their socks dirty—that is, people who are part of a group which is up to something. It's about you being more effective in the groups you are part of.

Most of us are not trained to operate successfully in groups and our inability to be effective is often frustrating and confusing.

A group of individuals

A group is made up of individuals. You, as an individual person, are different. And you have your own:

Family	Friends
Networks	Culture
Fellow workers	Other groups
Lovers	Associations and allegiances
Community	Town/city
Nation	Place in the world

Out of this background come your own particular:

Ideas	Beliefs
Hang-ups	Desires
Tragedies	Sense of humor
Level of tolerance towards others	Level of tolerance towards yourself
Memories	Hopes and fears
Dreams	Internal dialogue
Ways of speaking	Patterns of behavior

You, as a group member, come to a group with all of the above. We can describe this as *baggage*. Baggage is not right or wrong, it just is. We all have it. It helps to be familiar with your own baggage and to know what is contained in the various *suitcases*.

Given everything you take into a group, it is not surprising that being part of one is often a challenging experience loaded with possibilities and pitfalls.

Thinking Points

- ➡ Am I aware of some of my baggage?
- ➡ Am I comfortable with my baggage?
- ➡ Do I allow room for the baggage of others?

Who needs a group?

A camel is a horse designed by a committee!

People have a mixed attitude towards groups. On the one hand, you probably belong to all sorts of work, social, community and sporting groups. On the other hand, you will often be unhappy with group processes:

Groups take too long.

I'd rather do it myself.

It's too frustrating to be part of a group.

So, why should you be part of a group? When you want to do something you cannot achieve on your own, a group can be the most effective way to get it done. *But if you can do it alone, you don't need a group.*

What kinds of groups are there?

Some kinds of groups are:

Nuclear family

Households

Project groups

Task teams

Cultural groups

Special-interest groups

Extended family

Support groups

Work groups

Sports groups

Hobbies groups

Classes

There are also many other kinds of groups.

This book is mainly for groups of up to 30 people. Larger groups need different structures and processes. We will discuss these in Chapter 9.

Who belongs to the group?

Some groups have clearly identified members—you are part of the group or not part of the group and everyone clearly understands who is in it. Family and work groups are usually like this. Some groups are open and people can join and leave any time they want to.

It is not so easy to develop group identity when people are joining and leaving all the time. You may feel uncomfortable if someone joins your group without consultation or prior agreement by the whole group. This can also happen if someone leaves your group without saying anything or if they miss a session with no explanation.

It is helpful for your group to discuss the issue of membership at the first meeting. Clarifying this at an early stage can avoid confusion and conflict later on. Some of the membership choices which need to be made are:

- ☐ Is membership to be open (anyone can come to any meeting) or closed (only agreed people may attend)?
- ☐ Is what is discussed to be kept private?
- ☐ Do you all need to attend every meeting?
- ☐ What procedure do you and others follow if you can't attend?
- ☐ Can you bring guests with or without prior agreement?

If your group wants its work, decisions, or personal sharing to be confidential, then clear rules for membership are very important. Also, see Ground rules, Chapter 4, page 28.