



Communicating in Groups and Teams

SHARING LEADERSHIP

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S H A R I N G L E A D E R S H I P

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You may love working in groups, or you may hate it. Whichever way you feel, you can be certain of two things: First, you have company, because teamwork can be both gratifying and mind-boggling. Second, no matter how you feel, you *will* work in groups and teams extensively.

We've written this book because we know that your life and your career, whatever it may be, will involve you in cooperative group efforts. Organizations—big and small, private and public, profit and nonprofit—use groups and teams for everything from designing and implementing projects to managing to improving quality. That's because cooperative groups can be more effective than individuals at many tasks. When a team brings together people with different experiences and backgrounds to focus their attention on an issue, their diversity carries the potential for a wider range of ideas and approaches. Groups also have the potential, however, for breakdowns and misunderstandings; it takes wisdom to make them work.

You can develop the wisdom to make your groups and teams work effectively as you learn to understand them and as you hone your communication skills. A cooperative group or team is more than the sum of its parts; with several people interacting, communication among members multiplies in complexity. Members need strong communication skills to make their ideas clear, to understand others, to build a team, and to work together through the task processes of collaborative problem analysis and decision making.

This book will help you learn how to create good team experiences. It will help you most effectively if you know how we've designed it. We want to tell you, therefore, about the philosophical premises on which it's written; what we assume about you, the student; features that may help you learn; and how the book is organized.

Philosophical Premises

By philosophical premises, we mean beliefs that are basic to every part of this book. Let's begin by listing several of these.

A cooperative group should become a team. An effective task group builds a team by using the best abilities and talents of every member in a process that serves the needs of the individuals and of the task concurrently. This involves mutual commitment to vigilant, collaborative analysis as well as to team building.

Leadership is every member's responsibility. Each person must take responsibility for influencing the team's transactions and tasks. Each serves as member, facilitator, contributor, participant; each has a responsibility for the quality of group transactions and achievements, for the satisfaction of the members, and for ensuring that the functions of leadership are served.

A designated leader is more than a manager. Leaders guide their teams over obstacles; they empower team members to take leadership; they activate quality contributions, interaction, and responsibility-taking within the team; and they link the team to parent organizations and outside systems.

The team is a system within a system. Teams today frequently cross departments, organizations, or public institutions to weave a number of systems, subsystems, goals, and objectives together in cooperative efforts. Learning how to do this can help you to bridge and to heal some of the chasms in your world.

The team is a microcosm. People of both sexes and of many sociocultural and racial backgrounds interact in groups. Diversity contributes to quality teamwork when members appreciate differences, actively seek different points of view, and understand that communication behaviors and norms are influenced by gender, culture, and expectations.

The team is an ethical system. Groups must consider ethical dimensions both in a dialogical ethic of team transactions and in the decisions that they make. Principled members and leaders who focus attention on ethical questions and their potential impact at every stage of a team's development and work will make better decisions and realize healthier consequences than those who do not.

Assumptions about Students and Approaches to Learning

We think of you as one of our own students. We assume that, like our students, you have natural curiosity, an interest in becoming an effective group communicator, a desire to succeed, and some ideas about what teamwork is like.

You certainly have your own learning style; everybody does. You may also be like most people in that you learn best when you connect with the material in some real way. In the words of a Chinese proverb: "What I hear, I forget; what I see, I may remember; what I do, I understand."

These and other assumptions about you influence the features we have chosen to include in this book.

Features

This book is user-friendly. It is written for you, the student. It starts with you and your experience because we know that people learn, as Aristotle pointed out, from the known to the unknown. Learning works best when it starts where you are, with your experiences and your life.

The writing is directed to you and designed for your use. Throughout the book are clear checklists that will help you focus on exactly what works to make groups effective. Plenty of explanations, definitions, and examples clarify the ideas. Many of these come from our own experiences with students and with teams in organizations. If you interact with them, by creating your own examples and applying the definitions and concepts, the information will become more real to you.

The emphasis is on making your groups and teams effective. Theory and research are not emphasized for their own sakes, but are included as needed to make concepts clearer, to make a point, or to show relationships among different areas. The references contain excellent sources to which you can refer if you want to follow up on ideas for a research project.

Learning strategies are varied and interesting. We believe in varying learning experiences to meet a range of students' learning styles, so we've used a range of approaches. Because we also believe that learning about teamwork should be put in an applied perspective, the book has some real-life materials to show you how people are currently using what you are learning. Some of these are included in the text as examples, but some are in special formats.

Boxes Brief, inset boxes provide excerpts and synopses from newsletters and articles, as well as teamwork examples from corporations and from nonprofit, public, media, and political organizations.

A Serial Case Analysis In many chapters, inset boxes give you a series of steps in how the Environmental Defense Fund/McDonald's Corporation Waste Reduction Task Force developed its recommendations to McDonald's. This innovative cooperative venture, which completed its landmark work in 1991, tells you much about what intergroup cooperation can do. You can follow the case throughout the book.

Other Case Studies Other case studies are included in exercises and with pictures throughout the book, so you can analyze them, discuss the questions, and make recommendations.

Exercises Exercises at the end of each chapter provide opportunities for you to:

Observe and evaluate others, in class and in outside situations, as they work in groups and teams. Most chapters include forms for observation and evaluation of groups to help you apply the information in the exercises.

Participate in group and team experiences that focus on the content of the chapter.

Reflect upon and analyze your own experience and skill in relationship to the chapter's content.

Write about your observations and experiences.

These exercises will make your learning real and applicable.

Glossary Important concepts are printed in boldface so you will know that they are in the glossary at the end of the book. As you read, if you can't remember precisely what a term means from a previous chapter, you can refer to the glossary for a reminder.

Instructor's Manual Your instructor will doubtless use his or her own assignments and methods in the course. In addition, an instructor's manual contains assignments, exercises, case studies, evaluation forms, and test questions to help you work through the material in and out of class.

Organization

Learning *information* about groups and developing *skill* in working with them require you to deal with many things at once, and that presents a dilemma. Ideally, as students, you would know everything covered in the textbook before you began applying it. That isn't possible in a communication class. You must practice skills from the first moment of the semester, but information you need about these skills may be presented late in the book.

A textbook goes step by step through information that is intricately related throughout, and that doesn't always fit the way an instructor arranges the course. Your professor may well rearrange the book to suit the way your course is designed. In whichever order you use the chapters, however, it will help to know how they are arranged.

Part One (Chapters 1 and 2) starts with where you are—with your experiences in previous groups. It moves on into your future in groups and teams, your personal leadership responsibilities and roles, and the impact of ethics on your participation in groups and teams. This gives you a *thinking* foundation for the course.

Part Two (Chapters 3 and 4) introduces you to team processes—setting goals, getting the work under way. It also shows you a vision of an excellent team, and what you need to do to get one started. This part gives you a *doing* foundation—it gets you and your classmates started on activities and projects—and introduces you to what a developing team will experience.

Part Three (Chapters 5 through 8) guides you and your teammates through the task processes of goal setting, agenda design, team inquiry, critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and decision making. This part focuses your thinking and your work on vigilance and collaboration.

Part Four (Chapters 9 through 11) develops verbal, nonverbal, listening, and questioning skills for team communication. This includes assertive, confirming behavior that contributes to developing dialogue and healthy team climates. These chapters help you weave the transactional processes that make a team.

Part Five (Chapters 12 through 14) addresses some sophisticated, and critical, problems and challenges in group interactions and thinking. These include issues

of deviance and conformity, competitive communication, groupthink, conflict, and problems with members and meetings. This part gives you tools to deal with problems all teams might face.

Part Six (Chapters 15 and 16) guides you through team projects and reports—planning public meetings, and preparing and presenting written and oral reports. This part provides the key to finishing up course assignments effectively; it is also a valuable resource for future projects in other courses and your career.

The epilogue, finally, brings together what you have learned and suggests ways that teams can complete their experiences and say good-bye.

Acknowledgments

Our approach to this book is influenced by our own research and learning about group communication, and that started in a class such as yours. We have been fortunate in having excellent professors and mentors to guide us along the way. We take this opportunity to express thanks to Dennis Gouran who, when he was at Indiana University, influenced the way we think about group communication and directed Gay's dissertation in group leadership. He continues to provide his sage advice and, occasionally, consolation. We also are indebted to the late Martin Andersen for immersing us in the study of groups during our years at California State University at Fullerton. Our thanks, too, go to Juliette Venitsky of Cerritos College for helping us develop our early understanding of the communication discipline we have come to love.

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Although responsibility for the content is ours, several communication colleagues across the country reviewed drafts at various stages of development. They helped us keep perspective on the book's material and on students as its readers. These included David E. Butt, Penn State University; Patricia Comeaux, University of North Carolina–Wilmington; Isa Engleberg, Prince George's Community College; Charles Griffin, Kansas State University; Joan Holm, Northern Virginia Community College; James A. Jaksa, Western Michigan University; William E. Jurma, Texas Christian University; Matt Seeger, Wayne State University; and Brant Short, Idaho State University. Also, Freda Remmers, our colleague at Kean College, read an early draft and gave us excellent suggestions for changes. They are proof that multiple perspectives can lead to an improved final product.

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We dedicate this book to our families, friends, students, colleagues, and to each other. All have added to our understanding of the importance of communicating in groups and teams.

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