Chapter 4

Group Membership

INTRODUCTORY EXERCISES

1. Think of a group to which you belong. Make a list of the members and include one describing word for each one, focusing on what they do or contribute to the group. Share your results with classmates.
2. Think of a group to which you no longer belong. Make a list of the members and include one describing word for each one, focusing on what they do or contribute to the group. Share your results with classmates.

Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.

- Vince Lombardi

Getting Started

If all the world is a stage, then we each play distinct roles, whether we know it or not, when we are members of a group, team, family, or community. If we are aware of our roles, then we can know our lines, our responsibilities, and perform. When we do not know what we are supposed to do it is awfully hard to get the right job

done correctly the first time. In this chapter we will explore the many facets to group membership.

4.1 Introducing Member Roles

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Describe group member roles and their impact on group dynamics.

The performance of a team or group is often influenced, if not determined, by its members' roles.

We can start our analysis of member roles with the work of Benne and Sheats (1948). They focused on studying small discussion groups that engaged in problem-solving activities. From their observations they proposed three distinct types of roles: task, building and maintenance, and self-centered. **Task roles**[1] were identified by facilitating and co-coordinating behaviors such as suggesting new ideas or ways of solving problems. **Building and maintenance roles**[2] involved encouragement, including praise, statements of agreement, or acceptance of others and their contributions nonverbally or verbally. **Self-centered roles**[3] involved ego-centric behaviors that call attention to the individual, not the group, and distract or disrupt the group dynamic.

Table 4.1 Group Roles

1. Identified by facilitating and co-coordinating behaviors such as suggesting new ideas or ways of solving problems.

2. Involves encouragement, including praise, statements of agreement, or acceptance of others and their contributions nonverbally or verbally.

3. Involves ego-centric behaviors that call attention to the individual, not the group, and distract or disrupt the group dynamic.

Group Task Roles	Coordinator: facilitates order and progress
	Evaluator-critic: analyzes suggestions for strengths and weaknesses
	Orienter: focuses on group progress, recaps discussions

	Recorder: takes notes on the group discussions, important decisions, and commitments to action
Group Building and Maintenance Roles	Supporter: Encourages everyone, making sure they have what they need to get the job done Harmonizer: Helps manage conflict within the group, facilitating common ground, helping define terms, and contributing to consensus Tension-releaser: Uses humor and light-hearted remarks, as well as nonverbal demonstrations (brings a plate of cookies to the group), to reduce tensions and work-related stress Compromiser: Focuses on common ground, common points of agreement, and helps formulate an action plan that brings everyone together towards a common goal, task, or activity Standard Setter: Sets the standard for conduct and helps influence the behavior of group members
Self-Centered Roles	Aggressor: Belittles other group members Block: Frequently raises objections Deserter: Abandons group or is very unreliable Dominator: Demand control and attention Recognition-seeker: Frequently seeks praise Confessor: Uses the group to discuss personal problems

	Joker or Clown: Frequent use of distracting humor, often attention-seeking behavior.

Bales (1950) built on their research and analyzed interaction from two categorical perspectives: task-orientation and socio-emotional. Belbin's (1981) work on successful teams focused on the number of team members in a group and their respective roles. Imagine a baseball team, with each distinct team member with a clearly defined role and territory. Someone guards first base, and someone covers left field. Each person has both a role and a personality. The role, according to Belbin, was imposed. The team manager would assign a team member, or player in our example, to a position. Some people place first base better than others. Personality traits, talents, and relative skills are relatively stable over time (Pervin, 1989), and it was a challenge to match the best player to the most appropriate role. Get the combinations right across the whole team and you have a serious contender for the World Series. Get the combinations wrong and the manager will be looking for a job in short order.

Again the emphasis in this area of inquiry was effectiveness of teams. It is all about the win, or the progress, or the degree of completion. This line of investigation does not explore what it means to be a healthy family, or a productive community, though each type of group is related to this discussion.

Belbin (1981, 1983) used a Self Perception Inventory that consists of seven sections to assess which group member would be best for his nine group roles:

Table 4.2 Belbin's Role Characteristics

	Title	Description
1	Plant (PL)	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox. Solves difficult tasks and problems.
2	Resource Investigator (RI)	Extrovert, enthusiastic, communicative. Develops contacts, networks, and explores opportunities.
3	Co-Coordinator	Mature, confident, effective chairperson. Promotes decision-making, delegates, and clarifies goals.
4	Shaper (SH)	Challenging, dynamic, thrives on pressure. The drive and courage to overcome obstacles.

	Title	Description
5	Monitor Evaluator (ME)	Sober, strategic, and discerning. Makes accurate judgments. Perceives several options.
6	Team Worker (TW)	Cooperative, perceptive, mild, and diplomatic. Avoids tension, listens, a consensus builder
7	Implementer (IMP)	Reliable, disciplined, and efficient. Turns abstract ideas into practical actions
8	Completer-Finisher (CF)	Anxious, detail-oriented, and conscientious. Searches out errors and omissions. Delivers on time.
9	Specialist (SP)	Dedicated, self-motivated, and single-minded. Provides specific knowledge or skills

If someone in your group always makes everyone laugh, that can be a distinct asset when the news is less than positive. At times when you have to get work done, however, the class clown may become a distraction. Notions of positive and negative will often depend on the context when discussing groups. Table 4.3 "Positive Roles" and Table 4.4 "Negative Roles" list both positive and negative roles people sometimes play in a group setting.Beene, K., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. *Journal of Social Issues, 37*, 41–49.'McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Table 4.3 Positive RolesBeene, K., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. *Journal of Social Issues, 37*, 41–49.'McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Initiator—Coordinator	Suggests new ideas or new ways of looking at the problem
Elaborator	Builds on ideas and provides examples
Coordinator	Brings ideas, information, and suggestions together
Evaluator-Critic	Evaluates ideas and provides constructive criticism
Recorder	Records ideas, examples, suggestions, and critiques

Table 4.4 Negative RolesBeene, K., & Sheats, P. (1948). Functional roles of group members. *Journal of Social Issues, 37*, 41–49.'McLean, S. (2005). *The basics of interpersonal communication.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Dominator	Dominates discussion, not allowing others to take their turn
Recognition Seeker	Relates discussion to their accomplishments, seeks attention

Special-Interest Pleader	Relates discussion to special interest or personal agenda
Blocker	Blocks attempts at consensus consistently
Joker or Clown	Seeks attention through humor and distracts group members

Now that we've examined a classical view of positive and negative group member roles, let's examine another perspective. While some personality traits and behaviors may negatively influence groups, some are positive or negative depending on the context.

Just as the class clown can have a positive effect in lifting spirits or a negative effect in distracting members, so a dominator may be exactly what is needed for quick action. An emergency physician doesn't have time to ask all the group members in the emergency unit how they feel about a course of action; instead, a self-directed approach based on training and experience may be necessary. In contrast, the pastor of a church may have ample opportunity to ask members of the congregation their opinions about a change in the format of Sunday services; in this situation, the role of coordinator or elaborator is more appropriate than that of dominator.

The group is together because they have a purpose or goal, and normally they are capable of more than any one individual member could be on their own, so it would be inefficient to hinder that progress. But a blocker, who cuts off collaboration, does just that. If a group member interrupts another and presents a viewpoint or information that suggests a different course of action, the point may be well taken and serve the collaborative process. If that same group member repeatedly engages in blocking behavior, then the behavior becomes a problem. A skilled communicator will learn to recognize the difference, even when positive and negative aren't completely clear.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Group members perform distinct roles that impact and influence the group in many ways.

EXERCISES

1. Think of a group of which you are currently a member. Create a list of the members of your group and see if you can match them to group roles as discussed in this section. Use describing words to discuss each member. Share and compare with classmates.
2. Think of a group of which you are no longer a member. Create a list of the members of the group and see if you can match them to group roles as discussed in this section. Use describing words to discuss each member. Share and compare with classmates.

4.2 Norms among Group Members

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify positive sentiments, as well as challenges, associated with group norms.
2. Discuss ways in which group norms may be enforced.
3. Identify processes for challenging and changing group norms.

Knotty Norms

Before we had our daughter, my husband and I used to just take a couple moments before dinner and hold hands, just to bring us to a still quiet place, before beginning the evening meal. So, when he had our little girl, really from the time she could sit in the high chair, we held hands together, just for a few moments of silence, and then we squeezed hands and released.

Well, we did this day in, day out, year in, year out, and then when she was old enough to count--I don't know how old she was--but one evening we squeezed hands and she looked up and smiled and said, "I got to 35."

And her dad and I both looked at her and said, "What?"

And she said, "I got to 35." She said, "Usually I only get to 20 or 25."

And simultaneously, my husband and I said, "You count?"

And she looked at us and said, "Well, what do you do?"

And here all these years, where we thought this was just this little almost a spiritual moment, we never explained to her what that was about or what we were doing, and she thought we were all counting.

A *New Yorker* cartoon shows a couple that's apparently just left a large room filled with people partying. The woman is reaching to press the button of an elevator, while the man holds a tripod, a long pointer, and several large charts and graphs under his arm. The woman says, "Frankly, Benjamin, you're beginning to bore everyone with your statistics."

It's important to identify a group's norms if we're to have a good shot at predicting what it will do under different circumstances. In the comments above, the mother whose daughter used quiet time before dinner to count in her head thought her family's mealtime norms were clear to all its members, but she was mistaken.

Do members of a group understand its norms, then? And if they understand them, do they accept and follow them? When and how do they change them? The answers to these questions play a large role in determining the effectiveness of the members and of the group as a whole.

Responding to Norms

What does it mean to you if you say something is "normal"? Probably it means that you feel it's usual and right—correct? Part of your reaction to something you consider "normal," therefore, is likely to be a sense of comfort and assurance. Furthermore, you wouldn't want to intentionally engage in or be around someone who engages in behavior which you don't consider to be normal. The term for such behavior is, after all, "abnormal."

Shortly we'll examine how groups enforce their norms, what happens when people violate them, and how we can best to try to change them. Let's recognize first, however, that considering something "normal" or "the norm" in the first place can lead to challenges. As we'll be reminded later when we discuss conflict in groups, one such challenge arises from the fact that people's opinions—about everything—differ.

In a large organization where one of the authors worked, a male colleague told a joke while he and some other employees waited for a staff meeting to start. In the joke, a man who thought he had cleverly avoided being executed found that he had been outsmarted and was going to be raped instead. The people who heard the joke laughed, work-related topics came up, and the staff meeting commenced.

Sometimes differences of opinion in groups deal with inconsequential topics or norms and therefore cause no difficulty for anyone. Who cares, for instance, whether people bring coffee with them to morning meetings or not, or whether they wear bright-colored articles of clothing?

Up to a certain point, furthermore, we all tend to accommodate differences between ourselves and others on a daily basis without giving it a second thought. We may even pride ourselves on our tolerance when we accept those differences.

On the other hand, we know that things which are customary aren't always right. Slavery was once considered normal throughout the world, for instance, and so was

child labor. Obviously, we may find it challenging to confront norms that differ significantly from our personal beliefs and values.

Enforcing Norms

Whether a group enforces a norm, and if so in what way, depends on several factors. These factors may include the level of formality of the group, the importance the group attaches to a particular norm, and the degree and frequency with which the norm is violated.

If a norm is of minor importance, and especially if it's implicit, violating it may not provoke much of a response. Perhaps someone will just frown, shake a finger at the "violator," or otherwise convey displeasure without using words. (Think about a time when someone's cell phone went off in a large crowd at a speech or professional conference, for example).

On the other hand, explicit norms are often accompanied by explicit efforts to enforce them. A group may make it clear, either orally or in writing, what will happen if someone violates such a norm. The syllabus produced by one university professor we know, for instance, stipulated that anyone whose cell phone rings during a lesson must either write a 500-word essay or bring donuts to everyone else in class the next time they met.

Policy manuals and rule books comprise formal, clear expressions of norms both in and outside academe. So do city ordinances, state and Federal laws, and IRS regulations. These manifestations of norms include statements of what consequences will be associated with violating them.

On the level of a small group, a team of college students preparing for a class presentation might decide to have its members sign an agreement indicating their willingness to meet at certain predetermined times or to contact each other regularly by phone or text messages. The agreement might also indicate that the group will report a teammate to their instructor if that person fails to observe its terms.

The example we've just considered involves a form of punishment, which can be one consequence of violating a norm. What else can happen if you violate a group norm? Galanes & Adams (p. 163)Galanes, G., & Adams, K. (2013). *Effective group discussion: Theory and practice*. New York: McGraw-Hill. identify these consequences:

- loss of influence

- ostracism
- exclusion

Particularly within large organizations, groups can benefit from contemplating early in their "life cycle" just how they would expect to respond to various kinds of behavior that violate their norms. They may decide that punishment will be part of the picture for serious violations. If so, they should probably reflect on how members might rejoin the group or regain their stature within it after a punishment has been administered and an offense has been corrected.

Challenging and Changing Group Norms

Think back to the story about our colleague at the staff meeting. Evidently, he thought that the norms of the organization permitted him to tell his joke. When his fellow employees laughed, he probably also assumed that they found the joke to be amusing.

After the meeting, however, as four or five people lingered in the room, one of the female staffers spoke. "It's really hard for me to say this," she said, "but I'd appreciate it if you wouldn't tell jokes about rape."

The woman who expressed herself to the group made clear that she felt its norms needed to be changed if jokes about rape were considered acceptable. The woman was right in two respects. First, rape is no laughing matter, and a group norm which condones jokes about it ought to be rejected. Second, when she told her colleagues "It's really hard for me to say this," she illustrated that it's difficult to confront other people to propose that they change the norms they operate under.

In this case, one group member submitted a polite request to her fellow group members. As it turned out, those members accepted her request. The man who told the joke apologized, and to our knowledge no more jokes about rape were told in the group.

Things aren't always this straightforward, though. Therefore, adopting a systematic approach may prepare you for the wide-ranging situations in which you or your fellow group members want to change your norms. What principles and behaviors, then, should you follow if you feel a group norm is ineffective, inappropriate, or wrong?

Lamberton and Minor-Evans (pp. 226–227)Lamberton, L., & Minor-Evans, L. (2002). *Human relations: Strategies for success* (2nd ed.). New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill. recommend that you follow these steps:

1. Confirm whether everyone in the group agrees on the purpose of the group. Different norms will arise from different assumptions about the group's purpose and will fit the different assumptions on which they are based. Misunderstandings or disagreements about the purpose of the group need to be identified and worked through.

2. See if other people's understanding of the group's current norms is the same as yours. Again, it's important to know whether other members of the group agree on what norms the group actually has.

   Remember the examples at the beginning of this section, in which a small daughter thought that holding hands before dinner was a time for silent counting and a man thought it was okay to bring charts and graphs to a social occasion? They illustrate that it's possible to completely misconstrue a group norm even in close, ongoing relationships and at any age.

3. Explain to the group why you feel a particular norm ought to be changed.

4. Offer a plan for changing the norm, including a replacement for it which you feel will be better, drawing upon the full potential of each member.

5. If necessary, change the composition and role assignments of the group.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Once they have been established, group norms are generally enforced in some way but can also be challenged and modified.

EXERCISES

1. Identify two norms, one explicit and one implicit, that you've encountered in a group setting. Did you observe the norms being enforced in some way? If so, what kind of enforcement was employed, and by whom?

2. Describe a time when you were part of a group and believed that one of its norms needed to be changed. What made you feel that way? Was your view shared by anyone else in the group?

3. What steps have you taken to challenge a group norm? How did the other members of the group respond to your challenge? If you had a chance to go back and relive the situation, what if anything would you change about your actions? (If you don't recall ever having challenged a group norm, describe a situation in which someone else did so).

4.3 Status

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define status.
2. Discuss behaviors associated with high status in a group.
3. Identify dangers associated with status differentials.

When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen.

- Advertising slogan for a stock brokerage firm.

If you want to see your plays performed the way you wrote them, become President.

- Vaclav Havel

The higher up you go, the more mistakes you are allowed. Right at the top, if you make enough of them, it's considered to be your style.

- Fred Astaire

Status[4] can be defined as a person's level of importance or significance within a particular environment. In a group, members with higher status are apt to command greater respect and possess more prestige than those with lower status.

Have you ever wanted to join a group partly because you knew other people would respect you a little more if they knew you were a member of it? Whether an informal group, a club, or any other kind of organization thrives or fades away may depend to some degree on whether belonging to it is perceived as being a sign of status. In fact, one of the major reasons why many of us enter groups is that we expect to gain status by doing so.

4. A person's level of importance or significance within a particular environment.

Understanding status, thus, can help both group members and the groups they join function smoothly and productively.

Origins of Status in a Group

Where does a group member's status come from? Sometimes a person joins a group with a title that causes the other members to accord him or her status at their first encounter. In professional circles, for instance, having earned a "terminal" degree such as a Ph.D. or M.D. usually generates a degree of status. The same holds true for the documented outcomes of schooling or training in legal, engineering, or other professional fields. Likewise, people who've been honored for achievements in any number of areas may bring status to a group by virtue of that recognition if it relates to the nature and purpose of the group.

Some groups may confer status upon their members on the basis of age, wealth, physical stature, perceived intelligence, or other attributes. On one floor of a new college residence hall where one of the authors lived, for example, two men gained instant status. Why? Because they both took part in varsity athletics, and one of them was the son of an All-American football player.

Once a group has formed and begun to sort out its norms, it will also build upon the initial status that people bring to it by further allocating status according to its own internal processes and practices. For instance, choosing a member to serve as an officer in a group generally conveys status to that person.

The two athletes in the residence hall just mentioned were elected president and vice president of their floor, which simply reflected their original status. Meanwhile, other residents were chosen to fill additional roles in the group's government, which did add to those individuals' status.

What High Status Means

All right. Let's say you've either come into a group with high status or have been granted high status by the other members. What does this mean to you, and how are you apt to behave? Here are some predictions based on research from several sources (Beebe, S.A., & Masterson, J.T., 2006, Borman, 1989; Brilhart & Galanes, 1997; and Homans, 1992):Beebe, S.A., & Masterson, J.T. (2006). *Communicating in small groups: Principles and practices* (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson.'Borman, E.G. (1989). *Discussion and group methods: Theory and practice* (3rd ed.). New York: Harper and Row.'Brilhart,J.K., & Galanes, G.J. (1997). *Effective group discussion.* Dubuque, IA: Brown.'Homans, G.C. (1992). *The human group.* New York: Harcourt Brace & World.

First, the volume and direction of your speech will differ from those of others in the group. You'll talk more than the low-status members do, and you'll communicate more with other high-status members than you will with lower-status individuals. In addition, you'll be more likely to speak to the whole group than will members with lower status.

Second, some indicators of your participation will be particularly positive. Your activity level and self-regard will surpass those of lower-status group members. So will your level of satisfaction with your position. Furthermore, the rest of the group is less likely to ignore your statements and proposals than it is to disregard what lower-status individuals say.

Finally, the content of your communication will probably be different from what your fellow members discuss. Because you may have access to special information about the group's activities and may be expected to shoulder specific responsibilities because of your position, you're apt to talk about topics which are relevant to the central purposes and direction of the group. Lower-status members, on the other hand, are likely to communicate more about other matters.

When group members' status is clear to everyone, it becomes easier for all members to understand what they expect of each other. They'll know, among other things, whom to approach when they're wondering about how the group operates or are grappling with a problem that concerns them all.

If you've got high status, then, be prepared to have people approach you with questions and concerns that you'd otherwise not encounter. If it makes you feel good to help others in this way, having high status will probably enhance your self-respect and self-esteem. If it doesn't, you may feel overwhelmed.

Dangers of Status

Having people with different status levels adds spice and diversity to a group. It can, however, also result in risks and challenges.

Here's an example. In one large state, all the public and private college presidents have joined into an association to share information and promote their common interests. The executive director of the association is a woman we know well. She organizes the group's meetings, distributes agendas and minutes, and provides other high-level support for the group. According to this woman, presidents in the group continuously jockey for position and status. In fact, they spend so much time

trying to gain more status that they sometimes fail to contribute constructively to the work of the association.

At one annual conference of the presidents' organization, a particularly prominent and nationally-known figure from the business world was on the schedule as an after-lunch speaker. Several of the most active and assertive presidents approached the executive director and asked her to seat them next to the visitor at lunch.

Our friend was in a quandary. She didn't want to disappoint or displease any of the presidents. She knew, though, that no matter whom she allowed to sit next to the important visitor, all the other presidents who'd approached her would be disgruntled. We'll explain in a later section of this book how she solved this vexing problem. The point for now is simply that competition among status seekers can disrupt a group's progress.

"If you're riding ahead of the herd, take a look back every now and then to make sure it's still there."

  - Will Rogers

A second peril associated with the inevitable status differences in a group is the possibility that status may not correspond to competence. We'd like to believe that groups are **meritocracies**[5]—that is, that they recognize and reward talent. Sometimes, however, people's talents may be submerged or suppressed instead.

People in groups sometimes gain status and its perks just by sticking around longer than anyone else. Being involved in a group for an extended period does not, however, necessarily lead to wisdom or the capability to handle new responsibilities. As someone once put it, "It's possible to have 10 years of experience or one year of experience 10 times." Lawrence Peter (Peter & Hull, 1969)Peter, L.J., & Hull, R.(1969). *The Peter Principle: Why things always go wrong*. New York: William Morrow and Company. made a case for what he called "**The Peter Principle**[6]," which stated that everyone in an organization rises to his or her level of incompetence and that eventually every role is performed by someone unfit to manage it.

5. A system in which people gain status by having their talents recognized and rewarded.

6. The view that everyone in an organization rises to his or her level of incompetence and that eventually every role is performed by someone unfit to manage it.

Someone who gains status without possessing the skills or attributes required to use it well may cause real damage to other members of a group, or to a group as a whole. A high-status, low-ability person may develop an inflated self-image, begin to abuse power, or both. One of us worked for the new president of a college who acted as though his position entitled him to take whatever actions he wanted. In the

process of interacting primarily with other high-status individuals who shared the majority of his viewpoints and goals, he overlooked or pooh-poohed concerns and complaints from people in other parts of the organization. Turmoil and dissension broke out. Morale plummeted. The president eventually suffered votes of no confidence from his college's faculty, staff, and students and was forced to resign.

There's no such thing as a "status neutral" group—one in which everyone always has the same status as everyone else. Some people are always going to have higher status than others. As we've noted in this section, a group can make positive use of status differentials if it first recognizes them and then

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Differences in status within a group are inevitable and can be dangerous if not recognized and managed.

EXERCISES

1. Think of a time when you aspired to a new and higher status within a group. How did you demonstrate your desire? How did others in the group respond when you expressed what you hoped to achieve?
2. Recall a time when you gained status in a group. How, if at all, did the other members treat you differently after you acquired it? What new responsibilities or expectations did you face?
3. Consider a group that you're part of. What advice would you offer to someone seeking to raise his or her status in that group?
4. Have you ever been part of a group in which all the members seemed to have the same status? How were the group's activities affected by this equivalence?

4.4 Trust

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define trust.
2. Identify reasons why trust is difficult to establish and maintain in groups.
3. Discuss qualities and behaviors which contribute to establishing trust.
4. Describe how self-disclosure influences the level of trust in a group.

To have faith is to trust yourself to the water. When you swim you don't grab hold of the water, because if you do you will sink and drown. Instead you relax, and float.

- Alan Watts

To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful.

- Edward R. Murrow

(T)he biggest problem we have in human society now is...our tribalism, our tendency to go beyond a natural pride in our group, whether it's a racial or an ethnic or religious group..., to fear and distrust and dehumanization and violence against the other... So what we have got to learn to do is not just to tolerate each other, but to actually celebrate our differences. And the only way you can do that is to be secure in the knowledge that your common humanity is more important than your most significant differences.

- Bill Clinton
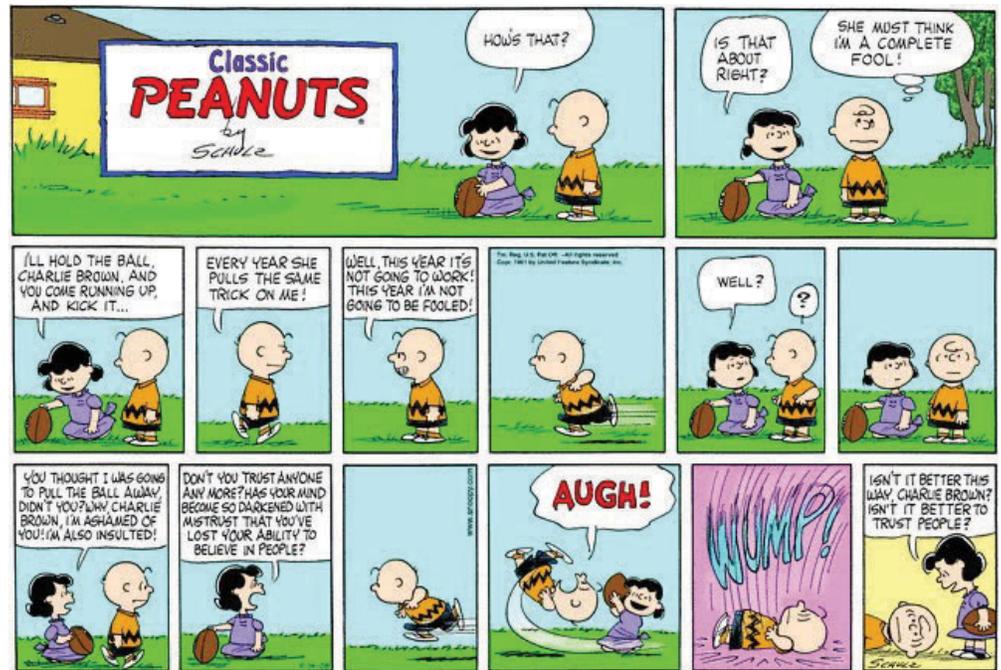
Did you ever see the series of "Peanuts" cartoons by Charles Schulz in which Lucy Van Pelt held a football for Charlie Brown to kick? In each cartoon, Charlie would run toward the ball at full speed. Lucy would jerk it away at the last instant. Charlie would then fly into the air and fall on his back. Time after time the cycle would repeat itself. Somehow, Charlie trusted Lucy over and over again despite her deceptive behavior.

Now recall the Aesop's fable, "The boy who cried wolf." The first time or two that the shepherd boy in the fable falsely called out an alarm, as you remember, people came running because they believed him. Eventually, when a wolf actually did show up, the boy's cries went unheeded.

The cartoon relationship between Charlie and Lucy may present an exaggerated view of human behavior. Likewise, most of us don't get exposed to multiple false reports about wolves or other dangers. Charlie's story amuses us, however, and the fable rings true. Why? Because we know that trust does play an important role in real human interactions and that it can be either rewarded or betrayed.

Building and maintaining trust can, in fact, be considered vital to the healthy functioning of a group. In his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni contended that trusting one another is the foundation for any truly cohesive team (p. 189).Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team: A leadership fable*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. If trust is lacking, according to Lencioni, four other

dysfunctions are almost sure to follow: fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results.

What, then, is **trust**[7]? We can define it as reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, or dependability of a person or thing. Ideally, we trust people the way Alan Watts wrote that we should trust water when we're swimming: we should relax and forget that we're even performing an action called "trusting." Unfortunately, sometimes the water we swim in as part of a group are sometimes murky, and occasionally they're even infested with sharks.

Why Is It Hard to Trust?

Trusting ourselves is sometimes difficult. We've all made mistakes, so it's natural that we might occasionally doubt our own reliability.

To trust a family member or a person in some other primary group may also present challenges from time to time. We may misunderstood each other, hurt each other's feelings by behaving in unexpected ways, and so forth.

What about trusting people in secondary groups like the ones we join in school or work settings, then? Most likely it's going to be harder still. Why? First, we usually don't spend as much time over as long a period with secondary group members as we do with our families and other primary group members. In other words, we don't have as much to go on as we decide whether we can trust these people.

Second, the dynamics and level of mutual reliability of a secondary group may vary over time as people enter and leave the group, change status within it, or experience new circumstances in their own lives. In an academic environment, for instance, a teacher who's established a reputation for fairness and wisdom in that role may raise doubts or even suspicions among former peers about his or her trustworthiness upon accepting an administrative position in the same organization.

The more people are involved in a group, the more changes are apt to take place in it. Because trust rests in large part on constancy and predictability, such changes may endanger or weaken it. As Richard Reichert (1970)Reichert, R. (1970). *Self-awareness through group dynamics*. Dayton, OH: Fglaum wrote, "Trust is always a gamble."

7. Reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, or dependability of a person or thing.

Cultivating and Reinforcing Trust

Charlie Brown kept letting Lucy hold the football for him because he was naively trusting. Even though she deceived him time and time again, he engaged in what the organizational theorist Robert Kharasch (1973)Kharasch, Robert N. (1973). *The institutional imperative; How to understand the United States government and other bulky objects.* New York: Charterhouse Books. called **"regeneration of the organs of belief"**[8]: he forgot or overlooked her past behavior and allowed himself to be duped over and over.

Alternatives to Charlie's approach certainly exist. In arms control dealings with Mikhail Gorbachev, for instance, Ronald Reagan used to quote a Russian saying—*doveryay, no proveryay* (Venditti, 2007).Venditti, P. (2007). *Building business success: Write, speak, think, and get along well in the professional world.* Centralia, WA: Gorham Printing. This meant "Trust, but verify." Reagan insisted that promises made by the Soviet Union concerning its nuclear weapons program be substantiated through empirical means such as official visits to military sites.

"I do not blame everyone else for my problems. Just you."

What Charlie Brown apparently didn't know, but Ronald Reagan evidently did, was that trust needs to be cultivated and reinforced—and occasionally even consciously tested—rather than taken for granted.

When we consciously decide we'll trust someone, it's best that we do so carefully and systematically. Gay and Donald Lumsden (2004)Lumsden, G., & Lumsden, D. (2004). *Communicating in groups and teams; Sharing leadership* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson. wrote that trust can be created if and when people demonstrate most or all of these qualities and behaviors:

- **Directness.** In mainstream American culture, "getting to the point" is usually valued over subtle or vague communication.
- **Openness to influence.** If a person seems receptive to others' ideas and preferences, he or she is likely to be seen as reliable and trustworthy.
- **Commitment to others' success.** When we feel that a person is concerned about others, we tend to feel more comfortable relying on him or her.

8. A tendency to forget past slights or difficulties caused by someone else and to resume trusting the person.

- **Personal accountability.** We prefer working with people who display integrity, in the sense that they can accept individual blame as well as praise for their actions.
- **A willingness to share responsibility for problems.** Very few difficulties in a group are caused by just one person. When someone admits that he or she "owns" at least part of a problem, we tend to feel that we can rely on him or her.

Bill Clinton's comments at the start of this section reflect the fact that trust can, indeed, be hard to establish. It can also be easy to lose, particularly in low-context cultures such as that of the United States which value explicit, comprehensive transmission of messages and feelings among people.

Self-Disclosure and Trust

Isn't it marvelous that groups, composed of so many different people each with constantly changing perceptions and desires, can function as well as they do? As we discovered earlier, groups decide upon norms which guide and govern their internal interactions and their relationships with people outside their membership. Somehow, people in most groups also successfully decide how much information is appropriate to communicate about themselves to others at what times.

Self-disclosure[9], which is the deliberate communication of information about yourself to others (Beebe & Masterson, 2006),Beebe, S.A., & Masterson, J.T. (2006). *Communicating in small groups: Principles and practices*. Boston: Pearson. can be risky. It's natural for us to want to play things safe in our lives. As the comedian Milton Berle said, "A worm has some things going for it. For instance, it can't fall down." No one wants to live like a worm, but revealing personal information opens us to "falling down" by being rejected.

We can share our feelings and concerns at many levels. These may range from superficial pleasantries—"Nice weather, isn't it?"—to what John Powell (1990)Powell, J. (1990). *Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?* Niles, IL: Argus Communications. called "peak communication." What level of self-disclosure the members of a group select will usually depend on the kind of situation or topic they're dealing with and the expectations they've established for each other.

Self-disclosure generally deepens and expands as a group matures, but members should always be conscious of how their level of self-disclosure fits each other's needs and desires. Like all other kinds of communication, self-disclosure needs to be reciprocal rather than one-sided if it is to grow healthfully. If one person

9. The deliberate communication of information about yourself to others.

discloses something personal and the second doesn't respond in kind, trust between them can be strained or broken.

Self-disclosure can clearly contribute to trust, but we need to be discreet when employing it. Too much, too soon, can hinder rather than help a group. In <u>Chapter 1 "Introducing Group Communication"</u> we drew a distinction between the task and relationship functions of groups. Although by its very nature self-disclosure engages people in considering personal material that may strengthen their relationship, it should also be relevant to whatever topic is being discussed at a particular time.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Although it's difficult to establish and maintain, trust among group members is vital if they are to function at the highest possible level.

EXERCISES

1. Think of one of the groups you participate in. Which other member of the group do you trust most? What has the person done or demonstrated to you that led you to trust him or her?
2. Describe a time when someone in a group of which you were apart betrayed or abused the group's trust. What might have prevented that behavior?
3. Identify a time when you engaged in appropriate self-disclosure in a group. What were the results?
4. Recall a time when you or someone else in a group practiced self-disclosure in a way that was not helpful to the group. What happened, and why did the results turn out as they did?

4.5 Membership in Digital Groups

PLEASE NOTE: This book is currently in draft form; material is not final.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify dangers involved in moving from one communication environment to another.
2. Identify major features of digital groups and what they imply regarding their members' behavior.

Unlike you, Phil, I hate computers. So I'm writing this in full view of my computer in order to torture it.

- A friend of one of the authors, in a letter written by hand in 2004

You think because you understand "one" you must understand "two," because one and one makes two. But you must also understand "and."

- Sufi Tradition

Different Strokes for Different Folks

The term "**code-switching**[10]" is used by linguists to describe how bilingual speakers sometimes sprinkle expressions from one language into another. The title of a classic article about code-switching provides an example of the phenomenon: "Sometimes I start a sentence in English y *termino en español*" (Poplack, 1980).Poplack, S. (1980). Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English *y termino en español*: Toward a typology of code-switching. In J. Amastea & L. Elías-Olivares (Eds.), *Spanish in the United States: Sociolinguistic aspects*, pp. 230–263. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

10. The practice among bilingual speakers of mixing expressions from one language into their communication in another.

Anyone who has come to command more than one language can attest that each of them transmits thoughts and emotions in unique and distinct ways. Code-switching

can sometimes lead to serendipitous insights, but it can also bring about awkward moments. Combining two languages, as the Sufi adage above suggests, is not just a matter of adding one and one.

The slang expression "different strokes for different folks," which was popular in the 1960s, indicated that it's fine to have diverse opinions and styles in society. Today, just as half a century ago, different folks use different methods of communicating depending on the groups they're members of. In the same way that mixing parts of whole languages may yield unexpected results, switching between sub-vocabularies within one language may produce happy surprises or difficulties. A story will illustrate how.

The father of one of the authors was raised in a traditional family in the American Midwest. Just after high school, as World War II was coming to a close, he was drafted into the army and sent to the Philippines. Almost all the people with whom he spent the next three years were other young American men like himself.

Part of army culture in those days was that soldiers of equal ranks routinely peppered their talk with profanity. Perhaps this shocked some new recruits, but most quickly overcame their initial reaction and got used to using blue language with everyone else. For virtually all the enlisted personnel, a "code" of foul language became habitual.

When the author's father completed his tour of duty and returned to the U.S. in 1948, he spent some time at home before going off to college under the GI Bill. Just a few days after his joyous return to his hometown, he and his parents and younger sister were eating lunch in their dining room. Conversation was lively but routine. At some point, in a polite tone, he said, "Mom, please pass the f-ing butter."

Nature and Implications of Social Media

In Chapter 1 "Introducing Group Communication" we defined social media and considered how they may affect people's interactions. Whether we employ them individually or with others as part of a group, such media generally permit or even encourage broad communication. They make it easy for us to spread information about our personalities, interests, and activities as broadly as we wish—even to total strangers.

Among the positive points of social media which we mentioned in Chapter 1 "Introducing Group Communication" were that they 1) allow people in different places to collaborate on projects; 2) permit people to maintain contact with each

other when they're not meeting formally; 3) enable group members to identify and collect information pertinent to their aims; and 4) focus attention primarily on messages instead of "status markers."

We noted that people using social media may commit unintentional or good-natured mistakes which lead to awkwardness or embarrassment. What we didn't mention then is that some people may purposely employ techniques via social media to hurt others. Ivester (2011)Ivester, M. (2011). *Lol...omg!: What every student needs to know about online reputation management, digital citizenship and cyberbullying*. Reno, NV: Serra Knight Publishing. identified many examples of such intentionally harmful social media communication. Among others, these included "**flaming**[11]," which is sending abusive messages with an intent to enrage someone; impersonating another person; "outing" an individual's personal or secret information; spamming, or sending large volumes of unwanted material; and **mashups**[12], which are alterations of digital content in such a way as to humiliate someone.

Social media, as we've seen, are wide-open spaces. Like the American "Wild West" 150 years ago, they can be unfettered and unpredictable territory.

Characteristics of Digital Groups

Now let's put aside our discussion of social media and think about what it means to be a member of a group connected by older and perhaps tamer forms of computer-mediated communication. In particular, let's consider digital groups that communicate solely or in large part via email, online discussion forums, or synchronous audio or video conferencing.

First, here are some notes about the nature of the kinds of digital groups we've just referred to:

Digital groups are pervasive. As of the end of 2011, nearly one of every three persons on Planet Earth had Internet access. In their guide to email, Shipley and Schwalbe (2007)Shipley, D., & Schwalbe W. (2007). *Send; The essential guide to email for office and home*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. indicated that trillions of email messages are sent each week in the United States alone. At the Federal level, they noted, the National Archives was expected to receive more than 100 million email messages from the Bush administration when it left office.

11. Sending abusive digital messages with an intent to enrage the recipient.

12. Alterations of digital content meant to humiliate someone.

Digital groups range widely in their formality level and longevity. Some are casual, whereas others are more official and rigorous. Like other secondary groups, they may also be temporary and directed toward short-term goals or permanent.

Digital groups are, at least at face value, egalitarian. Assuming they can access the Internet, all the members of a digital group have an equal chance to enter and communicate in its discussions.

Digital groups come in all sizes. Many, if not most, comprise more than the eight individuals that lots of authorities deem to be the upper limit of a "small group." This can be deceiving, however, since once something gets shared within the group it may very well be sent outside it, either intentionally or not. Given that nothing on the Web is ever really "private," it's probably wise to assume that messages in digital groups are shared either with no one or with everyone.

Digital groups may communicate via either "rich" or "lean" media (Waldeck, Kearney, & Plax, 2013).Waldeck, J. H., Kearney, P., & Plax, T. (2013). *Business & professional communication in a digital age*. Boston: Wadsworth. Although it's possible to be brusque or even rude in any digital medium, some media tend to be better able to convey signals of civility than others. **Rich media**[13], such as audio or video conferencing, tend to permit or facilitate understanding because they transmit non-verbal as well as verbal communication cues. **Lean media**[14] such as email or text messaging, which depend on written communication, are by their nature less capable of doing so.

Asynchronous feedback sent in digital groups may be limited, untimely, or otherwise inadequate. Because group members who use email or discussion forums usually don't see or hear each other immediately, "personalness" may be less than it would be if they were face to face. Without immediate cues to respond to, people sometimes shorten their messages or fail to include pleasantries that can promote easy understanding.

Regardless of the relatively intimate size of digital groups and the mutual familiarity among their members, the impact of asynchronous messages within them is always invisible. By this, we mean that someone who sends a message can't see and hear how its recipient responds right when that person reads, sees, or hears it.

13. Media which transmit non-verbal as well as verbal communication cues.

14. Media which depend solely on written communication and cannot easily convey non-verbal communication cues.

Unlike what happens in face-to-face groups, when individual members write to someone about something in a digital environment it's possible that others may be

doing so without their knowledge. Thus, the positive or negative impact of individually innocuous or mild messages may be magnified many times.

Advice for Members of Digital Groups

Even those of us who use computers all day long at work or school for serious purposes may participate in informal digital groups there or elsewhere. Usually, we move back and forth between these communication worlds easily and without causing ourselves or others any problems.

Still, we run the risk that, like the author's father, we may accidentally transfer habits and practices that are appropriate in one environment to another in which they don't fit. Here are some tips on how to minimize this kind of risk and others associated with communication in a digital group:

First, know your group's norms. If you're not sure about something, ask. When in doubt, don't.

Second, be especially careful about sending or responding to any message if you've just been in a physical or digital location with different norms. Depending on your interests, you may be part of some social media in which most messages are snarky. In fact, digital forums exist in which participants try to outdo each other at being mean. Why? In order to attract attention--which is, after all, one of the chief purposes many people use social media in the first place.

Third, be aware of potential gender-related communication differences. According to research by Susan Herring, for instance, many men find using aggressive language to be amusing (Shipley and Schwalbe, 2007).Shipley, D., & Schwalbe W. (2007). *Send; The essential guide to email for office and home*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. Women, on the other hand, may take such communication at face value and be put off or feel threatened by it.

Fourth, try to empathize. The physical distance inherent in digital communication can make us less sensitive to other people's feelings. Try to imagine the person(s) you're writing to sitting in front of you.

Finally, think twice about using what you consider to be humor. Use what Matt Ivester (2011)Ivester, M. (2011). *Lol...omg!: What every student needs to know about online reputation management, digital citizenship and cyberbullying*. Reno, NV: Serra Knight Publishing. calls "the 'Get It?' test" and ask whether your message might be misinterpreted. What seems clever or witty to you may come across very differently

to those who read it. Be particularly wary of using sarcasm (a word which, incidentally, comes from a Greek term for rending or tearing flesh).

Because of their electronic foundations, digital groups offer their members convenience and efficiency. Being a successful member of a digital group, however, requires focus, patience, and attention to the results of one's actions in a way that membership in a face-to-face group does not.

KEY TAKEAWAY

- Members of digital groups need to understand the nature and implications of those groups and act accordingly.

EXERCISES

1. Discuss these questions with one or two classmates: When considering communication in digital groups, is it truly possible to distinguish between personal and professional communication? Why or why not?
2. Think of a permanent digital group you're a member of and a temporary one. How, if at all, do the styles and contents of messages in the two groups differ?
3. Describe a misunderstanding you've experienced that resulted from the characteristics of a digital group using a "lean" rather than a "rich" medium.

4.6 Summary

In this chapter we have introduced task, group building, maintenance, and self-centered group member roles. We have described nine role characteristics, as well as five positive and five negative roles of group members. We have defined group norms and considered how people respond to norms, how norms are enforced, and how they may be challenged and changed. We have defined status; analyzed its origins and meaning within a group; and identified risks associated with it. We have examined the features of trust in groups, including ways to cultivate and reinforce it through such measures as self-disclosure. Finally, we have discussed the nature and implications of social media for groups and their members and made recommendations for actions to be taken by members of digital groups.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Interpretive Questions

   a. If a group member objects to the group's norms, what responsibility do you feel the other members bear for responding to the objection? Under what circumstances might the other members be justified in dismissing the objections out of hand?
   b. Competing for status in a group is considered by some people to be a healthy process which causes people to work hard and strive to excel. Given your experience in groups, do you endorse competition for status? Why or why not?
   c. What changes do you foresee in the technologies that can be used by digital groups? Which of the changes do you feel most comfortable? Least comfortable? Why?

2. Application Questions

   a. How do different types of member behaviors affect a group's behavior according to circumstances? Talk to someone who's part of a group you know something about. Ask for an example of how a dominator, a recognition seeker, or a self-interest pleader helped the group and have the person explain why this positive outcome took place.
   b. What risks are associated with status in groups? Interview at least one individual from three groups that you're not a member of yourself. Ask each person to recount a situation in which the status of an individual in the group caused misunderstandings, repressed communication, or brought about other negative outcomes within the group.
   c. What are reasonable bounds of self-disclosure in a group? Ask four people to identify a group of which they are members and describe circumstances in which they have found or might find it appropriate to share information within that group about their financial, marital, religious, or political status.

Additional Resources

Belbin Self-Perception Inventory with scoring guide:
http://executive.development.users.btopenworld.com/media/downloads/belbin_forms.pdf

Belbin's Self-Peception Inventory with scoring guide:
http://leadershippersonalities.wikispaces.com/file/detail/252727_BelbinSelfPerceptionInventory.doc

Belbin's Team Analysis with scoring guide:
http://leadershippersonalities.wikispaces.com/TEAM+Analysis

Belbin Test: http://freespace.virgin.net/richard.clifford/BelbinTest.doc

The Theory of the Leisure Class, written by Thorstein Veblen and first published in 1899, presented the concept of "conspicuous consumption" as one way for people to display and retain their status in society. Veblen's viewpoint was somewhat acerbic, but much of what he wrote still rings true in today's world and applies to group interactions.

Alain Botton's *Status Anxiety* provides an entertaining and thought-provoking perspective on the quest for status in the 21st century.

Public Speaking Resources:

http://www.speaking.pitt.edu/student/groups/smallgrouproles.html

http://wps.ablongman.com/wps/media/objects/1624/1663615/apxc_12.pdf

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