Organizational Behaviour

Group Behaviour

Group Structure
LESSON – 16

GROUP STRUCTURE AND GROUP PROCESS

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16.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

After completion of this lesson, the students may be able:
i) understand the types of attributes and personality characteristics required for the formation of group.
ii) explain the structural components of group and able to design an effective group
iii) discuss the dynamics of process with special reference to enhance its overall effectiveness and elicit synergy among group output.
iv) explain the phenomenon of groupthink and the remedial measures to overcome such phenomenon.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Individual members of groups bring with them certain individual characteristics that may have an influence on group behavior. An individual’s typical behavioral patterns such as how he or she reacts to others, and his available skill and abilities will have an impact on
the overall performance of a group. The discussion of individual characteristics and group behavior includes four main components: 1) biographical and physical characteristics, 2) abilities and intelligence, 3) personality and 4) expectations.

The structure of the group provides norms, social ranking influence, and the position or role that each member occupies in the group. The following components of the group structure are important: 1) group composition, 2) norms, 3) status, 4) emergent leaders 5) role definition and 6) group cohesiveness. Research studies have shown that conformity to group norms are a function of four factors; personality of the group member; situational factors; stimulus factors; and intra-group relations. Individuals conform to group norms generally in one of the three ways: conformity, rebellion or creative individualism.

16.2 GROUP MEMBER ATTRIBUTES
A group’s potential level of performance is, to a large extent dependent on the attributes that its members individually bring to the group. There are two attributes: i) knowledge, skills and abilities of an individual and ii) his personality characteristics.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ABILITIES
Intellectual abilities, skills and abilities are predicting the group’s performance more confidently. It is reported that individuals whose abilities are crucial for attaining the group’s tasks tend to be more involved in group activity and more likely to emerge as the group leaders. Further, they are satisfied if their talents are effectively used by the group. Intellectual ability and task relevant ability have both been found to be related to overall group performance. Group performance is not merely the summation of its individual member’s abilities. However, these abilities set the possibilities for what member can do and how effectively they perform in a group.

PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS
There is a high level of relationship between personality traits, group attitudes and behavior. It is reported that personality traits tend to have a positive connotation in our culture and tend to positively related to group productivity, morale and cohesiveness. These include traits such as sociability, self-reliance and independence. The magnitude of the effect of any single characteristic is small, but all together the consequences for group behavior are of major significance. Therefore, the personality characteristics of group members play an important part in determining group behavior.

16.3 GROUP STRUCTURES

FORMAL LEADERSHIP

Formal leader of the group:
He is its principal representative and is the one individual who can legitimately exert formal influence on the activities of the group. The leader is responsible for the direction and goal accomplishment of the group and can reward or punish individual member when
they do not comply with the directions, orders or rules of the group. Without a leader, the
group will never have direction and spirit to proceed further. Due to this, an organization
supports the leaders influence, and ensures that the leader has the power to make the
group members comply with directives.

**Informal Group Leaders:**
Informal group leaders generally are individuals who are respected by other group
members and who have acquired special status. The informal group leaders generally:

i) Aids the group in directing its activities toward goal accomplishment

ii) Embodies the values of the group

iii) Acts for the group in presenting their viewpoint when interacting with
management or other groups

iv) Facilitates the activities of the group by initiating group actions and assisting
in resolving group conflict.

The informal group leadership role can and often does change from person to person,
depending on the particular conditions that exist. An individual who is not able to
maintain the respect, status, and prestige of the group can be replaced by others who
embody the needed characteristics. To remain an informal leader person must have the
necessary qualifications, knowledge, and skills needed to aid and guide the group toward
goal accomplishment.

**ROLES**

Role refers to a set of expected behavior patterns attributed to someone occupying a
given position in a social unit. Roles are classified into three ways:

**Expected Role:**
It refers to the expectations of supervisors towards their subordinates on the type of
behavior or actions in their job. This expected role can be specified by giving a detailed
job description, position, title or by other directions from the organizations.

**Perceived Role:**
This concerns the set of activities or behaviors of the group that an individual believes he
or she should do. Most of the time, the perceived role corresponds to the expected role.
Many factors may be present in a situation that can distort the individual’s perception and
thus make the perceived role inaccurate.

**Enacted Role:**
This refers to the way in which the individual group member actually behaves. The
enacted role is generally dependent on the perceived role

If there is any differences exist between or among these roles, a considerable level of role
ambiguity or role conflict exists. Role ambiguity is the lack of clarity regarding job duties,
authority and responsibility that the individual perceives in his role. It can be caused by a
number of factors such as lack of clear job description, occupational levels with complex
set of duties, lack of training, experience and clear job responsibilities, lack of self confidence and other personalized factors. Role conflict occurs when multiple demands and directions from one or more individuals create uncertainty in the worker’s mind concerning what should be done, when or for whom. Employees must receive directions or expectations only from one source. But in recent times, the employees have multiple roles and therefore can receive multiple directions. Two different types of role conflict exist; i) intra-role conflict and ii) inter-role conflict.

**Intra-role conflict:** It is created by many different directives sent simultaneously to some one occupying one role, making it impossible for the individual to satisfy all directives at the same time. For example: Production supervisor experiences role conflict by getting conflicting demands from four sources such as i) production manager is demanding greater emphasis on steady production levels and attention to cost control ii) Sales manager asking not only for a greater variety of products, but also different qualities of products for select customers ii) Maintenance managers demanding him to shutdown the plant to do repair work. iv) Workers want more overtime, better working conditions and less interference in their work from supervisors.

**Inter-role conflict:** It is created by many simultaneous roles presenting conflicting expectations. It exists when an individual finds that compliance with one role requirement may make it more difficult the compliance with another. At the extreme, it would include situations in which two or more role expectations are mutually contradictory.

All of us to face role conflict at various times. The critical issue is how the different role expectations imposed by organizational requirements affect our behavior. Certainly they increase internal tension and frustrations. There are a number of behavioral responses to resolve such conflicts by following the organizational rules, regulations and procedures that govern organizational activities. Other behavioral responses may include withdrawal, staffing, negotiations, etc.

**NORMS:**

Norms act as standards of behavior and performance. Norms can be described as shared belief among group members as to what behaviors are appropriate if one desires to be a part of and belong to the group. It refers to acceptable standards of behavior that are shared by the group members. Norms direct employees on what they ought and ought not to do under certain circumstance. When agree to and accepted by the group, norms act as means of influencing the behavior of group members with minimum of external controls. Norms become unwritten rules, or implicitly understood codes of conduct for group members. Interestingly, norms become explicit only when they are broken. For instance, if the norms of a group include punctuality in attendance, and if group members come late, the other members are likely to react to this behavior in several subtle or not so subtle ways. Some of the types of norms are as given below:
i) Performance related norms: Setting targets such as number of units produced per day, number of calls attended etc will be performance related norms.

ii) Non-performance related norms: Formal dress code, visiting office during weekends, accepting transfers to distant locations etc, will be non performance related norms.

iii) Informal Social Arrangements: These norms come from informal work group and primarily regulate social interactions within the group. These norms influence friendships on and off the job, whom group members eat lunch with, and social activities.

iv) Allocation of Resources. This is related to fixing pay, assignment of difficult jobs, and allocation of new tools and equipments etc.

v) Norm Conformity: An important issue facing all the managers of group is the degree to which employees conform to group norms. There are certain factors which strongly influence members to conform to group norms. They are as follows:

   i) **Personal factors:** It is reported that more intelligent individuals are less likely to conform than are less intelligent individuals and that the more authoritarian an individual is, the less likely that he or she will conform to group norms.

   ii) **Situational factors:** The size, structure of the group, social contexts etc strongly influence the norm conformity. As the size of the group increase beyond certain limit say more than 10-12, the conformity to norm is likely to decrease.

   iii) **Stimulus Factors:** The more ambiguous the stimulus, the greater will be the conformity to the group norms. The uncertainty will force the members to work together to minimize its level and attain clarity in the work roles.

   iv) **Intra-group relationship:** The types of intra-group relationships such as the kind and extent of group pressure exerted, the rate of success achieved in reaching group goals, the degree of identification with group goals etc. strongly influence members to conform to the group norms.

Norms are thus learnt by members through observation, and through reinforcement (being rewarded when one conforms to valued norms and punished when one violates valued norms), if an individual consistently transgresses the norms, ignoring the signals sent out by members, the worst punishment will follow. He or she will sooner be totally ignored and devalued as a member of the group, thus losing status in the group.

**Establishing Norms**

Norms are developed based on the following four ways:

i) **Explicit statements made by a group member:** Ensuring that no personal telephone calls will be entertained during the office hours and getting acceptance from all the employees will help to create an order.

ii) **Critical events in the group’s history:** The accident occurred to a visitor of factory premises due to his negligence will help to enforce certain guidelines and becomes norms to every one.
iii) Primacy: The initial behavior pattern exhibited by the group will become a norm and difficult to change.

iv) Carry-over behavior from the past situations: New members expectations, experiences will help reformulate or revise certain norms to meet the current requirements.

**The advantages of group-norms:**

Enforcing group norms will help the organization in so many ways. Some of the advantages are

i) It facilitates the group’s survival

ii) It increases the predictability of group member’s behavior

iii) It reduces embarrassing interpersonal problems for group member

iv) It allows members to express the central values of the group and clarify what is distinctive about the group’s identity.

Groups attempt to perform at a level equal to their established performance norms. The degree of socializations will affect not only the level of performance of individual group members, but whether the individual will remain as a group member.

**STATUS:**

Status is defined as a social ranking within a group and is assigned to an individual on the basis of position in the group or individual characteristics. Status can be a function of the title of individual, wage or salary level, work schedule mobility to interaction with others with or outside the group, or seniority. Status also refers to the importance and reference that people give to others. People at higher levels of the organizations and those who have accomplished much are ascribed or bestowed higher status. People perceive those high status persons as having more control, being more competent and as having more influence over group decision than low status individuals. Members having charisma, a high level of experts and access to the organization’s resources will be accorded higher status than those who do not have them. Demographic factors such as gender, age, educational level and length of service in the organization will have an effect on the status enjoyed by the member of a group. Group characterized by high status congruence tend to perform better than the groups in which there is status incongruence.

**Formal and Informal Status:**

Formal Status: The hierarchical position, job title, perks assigned to these positions is formally assigned to the job holders. By virtue of holding such position, a person is viewed as high.

Informal Status: Status may be informally acquired by such characteristics as education, age, gender, skill or experience.

**Status Equity:** Maintaining status hierarchy in equitable manner is essential to keep the moral of the employees. When inequity is perceived, it creates disequilibrium that results in various types of corrective behavior. This is noticed in such occasions – promotions, overseas job assignments etc.
**Status and Culture:** Different cultures assign different weightings to the status. French people are highly status conscious than Latin Americans. Status for Latin Americans and Asians tends to be derived from family position and formal roles held in organizations.

**SIZE:**

The size of the group is an important determinant of overall effectiveness of the group. But it is depending upon the objective of the group. If the group is interested to generate creative solutions, the larger the size of the group will be more ideal. If the group is interested to get more cohesiveness and try to get quick output, the smaller the size will be more ideal. Groups of approximately seven members tend to be more effective for taking quick action. The size of the group is linked with social loafing.

**Social Loafing:** It is the tendency of group members to do less than they are capable of individually, resulting in an inverse relationship between group size and individual performance. The more the number of employees assigned to do a task, the lesser will be the amount of their effort than they normally tend to carry out in performing their tasks individually. For instance, in group rope pulling task, it is expected that the groups’ effort would be equal to the sum of the efforts of individuals with in the group. That is, three people pulling together should exert three times as much pull on the rope as one person. The result, on the contrary, showed that three members in a group exerted only two times the average individual performance, lesser than the individual level effort. The primary reason is the diffusion of responsibility as the results of group cannot be attributed to any single person.

**COMPOSITION AND DIVERSITY:**

Group composition refers to the degree to which members of a group share a common demographic attribute such as age, gender, race, educational or length of service in the organization and the effect of this attribute on performance, satisfaction and turnover. The composition of a group may be an important predictor of productivity, satisfaction, and turnover. Group composition will be based on homogenous or heterogeneous characteristics of the members.

**Homogenous Groups:**

In homogeneous groups the compatibility with respect to needs, motives and personalities has been found to be conducive to group’s effectiveness because it facilitates group cooperation and communication. Although the homogeneity tends to reduce the potential for conflict, it also can create an overabundance of conformity, resulting in unproductive group activity. Groups composed of individuals with similar and compatible characteristics may be expected to behave in similar ways and will perform more effectively on tasks that are routine and less effectively on tasks that are complex and require a diversity of problem solving approaches.
Heterogeneous Groups:

In heterogeneous groups, the variation in individual characteristics help to produce high performance levels and a high quality of problem solving because members stimulate the intellectual abilities of one another. The heterogeneity of individual characteristics in such groups can create situations in which the potential for conflict is great. Heterogeneous groups can be expected to perform more effectively on tasks that are complex and require creative or innovative approaches to the problem, but less effectively on tasks that are routine and require a high level of individual conformity and coordination. For example, a group of research scientists are attempting to develop a new product of petrochemical. The nature and complexity of the task requires a diversity of talents, knowledge, and creative approaches which is provided more effectively by a heterogeneously composed group.

Homogeneous groups perform well on tasks that are uniform and routine. Homogeneity, while reducing the potential for dysfunctional conflict to arise, may be detrimental to performance if there is an overemphasis on conformity. Heterogeneous groups perform well on tasks that are complex and non-routine and that require a diversity of talents and viewpoints. However, heterogeneity can create conflict.

16.4 GROUP PROCESS

SYNERGY
Synergy refers to the cumulative effect of two or more substances which is different from the individual summation of those substances. It connotes the creation of a whole which is greater than the sum of the individual parts. For example, synergy is obtained when 2 + 2 is not merely 4, but can be made to add up to more than 4. For example, three engineers are given the tasks of solving a problem. The ideas generated jointly by these three engineers will be richer and more creative than if the three engineers individually generated their own ideas without any interaction among them. The ideas generated jointly will be better than the individually generated ideas because the three now jointly and creatively explore several different alternatives, discuss the pros and cons and develop integrated thoughts which are more innovative, thus arriving at a much more powerful solutions than what they would have been able to achieve individually. The group has developed synergy by merely interacting with each other using their combined wisdom to generate integrated solutions. This is positive synergy.

Social loafing represents a negative synergy where the whole is less than the sum of the parts where individuals are likely to reduce their effort due to diffusion of responsibility.

Social Facilitation Effect: The mere presence of others also affects the performance of individual. It reported that the presence of others tend to improve performance when the tasks are relatively simple and well rehearsed. This Positive effect is termed as Social Facilitation Effect.
Social inhibition effect: This leads to a detrimental effect which occurs when an individual is asked to perform a complex task with which he is unfamiliar or in which he is unskilled to do any work.

GROUP COHESION:

Cohesion refers to the extent of unity in the group and is reflected in the members’ conformity to the norms of the group, feelings of attraction for each other, and wanting to be co-members of the group. Attraction, cohesion and conforming to norms are all intertwined. The more the members feel attracted to the group, the greater will be the group cohesion. The greater the cohesion, the greater the influence of group members to persuade one another to conform to the group norms. The greater the conformity, the greater the identification of the members with the group, and the greater the group cohesion. Cohesive groups work together to achieve the group goals. They can be considered as valuable assets to the organization if the group’s goals coincide with the organization’s goals.

Factors increasing Cohesiveness: The following factors can facilitate to increase the cohesiveness of the work group.

i) Agreement on Group Goals: If the group agrees on the purpose and direction of its activities, this will serve to bind the group together and structure interaction patterns towards successful goal accomplishment.

ii) Frequency of Interaction: When group member have the opportunity to interact frequently with each other, the probability for closeness to develop will increase. Managers can provide opportunities for increased group interaction by calling frequent formal and informal meetings, providing a common meetings place or physically designing the facilities so that group members are within sight of one another.

iii) Personal Attractiveness: Cohesiveness is enhanced when members are attractive to one another if mutual trust and support already exists. Personal attraction also helps group members to overcome obstacles to goal accomplishment and personal growth and development.

iv) Inter-group Competition: Competition with other groups, both written and external to the organization is a mechanism that acts to bring groups closer together for attaining a common purpose.

v) Favorable Evaluation: If a group has performed in an outstanding manner, some recognition for its performance by management serves to elevate the prestige of the group in the eyes of the group members and other members of the group. Favorable evaluation helps make group members feel proud about being members of the group.
vi) Group Size: As the size of the group increases, the frequency of interaction each member has with other group members decreases, thus decreasing the probability that cohesiveness will develop. Past studies have shown the groups of four to six members provide the best opportunity for interaction.

vii) Pleasant experiences with the group: When group members are attracted to each other or there is a full trust and cooperation, interaction may become a pleasant experience resulting in high level of cohesiveness in the group.

viii) Lack of Domination: When one or few members dominate the group, cohesiveness cannot adequately develop. Such behavior can create smaller “cliques” within the group or identify individual members as isolates or deviates.

ix) Gender of Members: It is reported that women tend to have greater cohesion than men. A possible reason is that women are more likely to be feeling types than thinking types.

x) Previous Success: If a group has a history of success, it builds an espirit de corps that attracts and unites members. Successful organizations find it easier to attract and hire new employees than unsuccessful ones.

xi) Humor: Humor has been linked to increased cohesion in several studies.

It is reported that the greater the cohesion, the greater the influence of the group over the behavior of members and subsequently group performance. As groups are composed of individuals who are attracted to the goals of the group and to each other, one would expect to find a strong relationship between cohesiveness and group performance.

The major difference between highly cohesive and low cohesive groups would be how closely members conformed to the group norms. Further, the group performance would be influenced not only by cohesion, but by the level of group norms.

16.5 Group Decision Making
Groups offer excellent techniques for performing many of the steps in the decision-making process. They are a source of both breath and depth of input for information gathering. If the group is composed of individuals with diverse backgrounds, the alternatives generated should be more extensive and the analysis will be more critical.

Strengths of Group Decision-making:
The following aspects identified the main advantages that groups offer over individuals in the making of decisions.

i) More information and knowledge: By aggregating the resources of several individuals, the group brings more input into the decision process.
ii) Increased diversity of views: Group brings heterogeneity to the decision-making process and this opens up the opportunity for more approaches and alternatives to be considered.

iii) Increased acceptance of a solution: The group acceptance facilitates higher satisfaction among those employees required to implement it.

iv) Increased legitimacy: The group decision making process is consistent with demographic ideals and therefore may be perceived as being more legitimate than decisions made by an individual.

**Weakness of group decision making:**
Some of the main disadvantages are:

i) Time-consuming: It takes time to assemble a group.

ii) Pressures to conform: The desire by group members to be accepted and considered as an asset to the group can result in squashing any overt disagreement, thus encouraging conformity among viewpoints.

iii) Domination by the few: Few people will try to dominate the group discussion. If such people are happened to be mediocre, the group overall effectiveness will suffer.

iv) Ambiguous responsibility: In group decision, the responsibility of any single member is reduced.

### 16.6 Group Think and Group Shift

**GroupThink**

Groupthink refers to a situation where group pressure for conformity deters a group from critically evaluating unusual, unpopular or minority views. It is phenomenon that occurs when group members become so enamored of seeking concurrence that the norm for consensus overrides the realistic evaluation of alternative course of action and the full expression of deviant, minority or unpopular views. It describes deterioration in an individual’s mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgment, as a result of group pressures.

The results of groupthink are often such that poor quality decisions are taken and inappropriate responses are made to situational needs. The following are the antecedents of Groupthink:

i) Excessive group cohesiveness

ii) Insulation of group from external information and influence

iii) Lack of impartial leadership and of norms encouraging proper procedures

iv) Ideological homogeneity of members

v) High stress from external threat and task complexity

These antecedents are relating to basic structural faults in the group and to the immediate decision making contexts. The following are some of the symptoms of groupthink:

i) Feelings of invulnerability and unanimity

ii) Unquestioning belief that the group must be right

iii) Tendency to ignore or discredit information contrary to group’s position

iv) Direct pressure exerted on dissidents to bring them into line
v) Stereotyping of out-group members  
vi) Ignore external information  
vii) Overestimate its own abilities and capabilities to make good decision  
viii) Rationalize or reject data that tend to disconfirm its original views and judgments  
ix) Apply direct pressures on those who momentarily express doubts about any of the group’s shared views  
x) Those who have doubts or different viewpoint keep silent about misgivings and even minimizing to themselves the importance of their doubts.

In a group where the groupthink phenomenon operates, members constantly monitor and censor themselves to ensure that they are going along with the group’s opinion and not deviating by expressing a different viewpoint. Too much cohesion has the built-in danger of group member falling into the trap of groupthink, which in turn, compromises good decision-making, especially in complex situations.

**Group Shift**

It is reported that group is willing to take greater risks than when the same members make decision individually. In case more financial commitment is involved, individuals tend to be very cautious and make conservative decisions. However, when the same kinds of decisions are made by groups, the decisions made are less conservative. Groups feel more at ease and comfort in making riskier decisions. Higher risk taking behaviors in a group are probably a function of the responsibilities for the consequences of the decision making shared by all the group members rather than one individual assuming more burdens by himself. This phenomenon for groups to take greater risks while making critical decisions when compared to individual decision making is known as the Groupshift.

The most plausible explanation of the shift towards risk seems to be that the group diffuses responsibility. Group decisions free any singly member from accountability for the group’s final choice. Greater risk can be taken because, even if the decision fails, no one member can be held wholly responsible.

16.7 **Let Us Sum Up**

In this unit, we have discussed about the attributes of group members, structural components of group and group decision making.

16.8 **Lesson-end Activities**

1. Explain the role of personality characteristics and member attributes in enhancing the group cohesiveness.

2. What are the key structural components of the group? Design an affective work group for an R&D organization which is assigned to develop a new product. Explain the group dynamics and emphasize the various methods of eliciting synergy in getting group output.

4. What are the symptoms of groupthink and group shift and the ways in which such symptoms can be overcome?