Groups are and always will be essential to human life. Although some may bemoan the growing alienation of individuals from the small social groups that once linked them securely to society-at-large, the single man or woman who has no connection to other men and women is an extraordinarily rare human being. Each one of us is an individual seeking our personal, private objectives, but we are also members of groups that constrain us, guide us, and sustain us. We are capable of surviving alone, but few of us choose to, for virtually all human activities—working, learning, worshiping, relaxing, playing, and even sleeping—occur in groups. No one knows for certain how many groups exist at this moment, but given the number of people on the planet and their groupish proclivities, 30 billion is a conservative estimate (full citations can be found at www.richmond.edu/~dforsyth).

**WHY DO GROUPS MATTER?**

Why study groups? The answer is not complicated: Because groups hold the secret to the universe—the interpersonal universe, at any rate. Human behavior—and leadership in particular—is so often group behavior that people must be studied in context; embedded in their families, friendship cliques, work groups, and so on rather than in isolation. We often think that individuals are self-made, with each person controlling who they are and what they will become, but in reality we are group-made. Groups shape profoundly our actions, thoughts, and feelings. Groups, too, are important to understand for practical reasons. Much of the world’s work is done by groups, so by understanding them we move toward making them more efficient. If we want to improve productivity in a factory, problem-solving in a boardroom, or learning in the classroom we must understand groups.

Groups, too, hold the secret to understanding the processes that link leaders to their followers. Leadership can occur across great distances, as when a leader influences, and is influenced by, followers who are distributed across differing domains, but in many cases leadership is nested in an intact group that exists in a specific locale: teams, boards, advisory councils, and classrooms are all examples of groups that work toward shared goals under the direction of a leader. Because so much leadership takes place in groups, skilled leaders must understand the basic principles of group dynamics; the interpersonal processes that unfold in groups over time.

This reading reviews, briefly, the impact of groups on individuals’ actions, thoughts, and feelings. Although we can only review a fraction of the fascinating field of group dynamics, here we will consider some basic questions about groups and the processes that unfold within them, including: What is a group, and how is it different from a category or social network? Why do the members of groups sometimes experience periods of intense interpersonal conflict? How are groups organized? Why do some groups make such dreadful decisions, whereas others show good judgment?

**THE GROUP-LEVEL PERSPECTIVE: SEEING GROUPS**

On May 10, 1996, just after midnight, the members of the Adventure Consultants Guided Expedition crawled from tents pitched high atop Mount Everest to begin the final leg of their journey to the top of the world. The group included clients who had paid hefty sums to join the expedition and hired guides who set the climbing lines, carried provisions, and lead the way. Rob Hall, an experienced high-altitude climber who had scaled Everest four times before, was the team’s leader.
Hall guaranteed his clients that he would get them to the top of the mountain safely, but he could not keep his promise. The most experienced climbers reached the summit by early afternoon, but the others were moving so slowly that they could not both summit and return to the safety of the highest camp. But they continued their dogged ascent, well after caution demanded they turn around. Many of them suffered from oxygen deprivation, for the air above 24,000 is so thin that most hikers breathe from tanks of oxygen. Even these supplements cannot counteract the negative effects of climbing treacherous, ice-coated terrain, and many suffered from confused thinking, nausea, and dizziness. Yet, they may have still managed to climb to safety had it not been for the storm—a rogue blizzard with 60-knot winds that cut the climbers off from camp and any hope of rescue. When the storm lifted the next day 4 members of the Adventure Expedition group were dead. The victims included two clients (Douglas Hansen and Yasuko Nanba), a guide (Andrew Harris), and the group’s leader (Rob Hall).

**Varieties of Groups.** The Adventure Consultants expedition was, in many respects, a unique collection of people facing a unique problem, but nonetheless it was group: two or more individuals who are connected to one another by social relationships. It was a relatively small one, with 26 members counting all the support personnel. Some groups are smaller still, with just two or three members, but others include thousands of members (e.g., audiences at rock concerts, the members of a church’s congregation). Its members were united in their pursuit of a shared goal, as is so often the case with groups. The team was also a planned group—deliberately created for a specific purpose by Rob Hall—rather than an emergent group that formed spontaneously. In most cases the members of the group are interdependent: their outcomes are determined by other members of the group.

Not all collections of individuals are groups, however. A mob or a crowd, for example, may be so large that only the potential for influence exists within the aggregation. Similarly, people waiting for a bus may not seem to fit the definition of a group, but they may become a group when one passenger asks the others if they can change a dollar bill. In general, when members are similar to one another, or they are frequently together rather than apart, then this aggregation of individuals may also be considered a group to onlookers and by the members themselves. People also spontaneously draw distinctions among intimate groups, task-focused groups, large networks, and more general social categories (e.g., Northerners, Americans).

These intuitive appraisals of groups, even though highly subjective, nonetheless influence how people respond to social collectives. A mere collection of individuals can be transformed into a group when the members, or others outside the group, label the collective a group. When, for example, researchers repeatedly told women working in isolation that they were members of a group, the women eventually accepted the label of group and felt badly when told their group had performed poorly. Even individuals, who meet only on the Internet rather than in face-to-face settings, will eventually come to feel as though they are part of a group when they are labeled as such. In sum, when a group is perceived to be “real,” it becomes real in its consequences.

**Power of Groups.** Why did the Adventure Consultants expedition end tragically? The explanation can be found, in part, by considering the individual members of the expedition: Hall’s decision to continue climbing late into the afternoon; client Doug Hansen’s intense desire to reach the summit; client Jon Krakauer’s superb mountaineering skills; and guide Andy Harris’s mental confusion in the high altitude. But the climbers’ thoughts, emotions, and behaviors over the course of the expedition were not solely the product of only their personal qualities. A full accounting of the expedition and its outcomes must recognize that the individual climbers were members of a group, and that their thoughts, emotions, and actions both shaped, and were shaped by, this group. This group-level perspective assumes each person is a constituent in an encompassing group, organization, or society, and that each person’s reactions are shaped by (and shape) that larger system.
This group-level explanation of people’s thoughts, emotions, and actions is not as intuitively appealing as an individual-level analysis. Even though people throw concepts like “teamwork,” “group goals,” “gangs,” and “cliques” about in their discussions of contemporary issues, they tend to see only the individuals in these groups, and not the groups themselves. If people are asked to explain other people’s actions, they tend to stress personal, individual qualities rather than group-level forces. Why did Hall push the group beyond its limits. Because he was a driven, high achiever. Why did Jon Krakauer live? Because he was highly skilled. Such explanations, however, overlook the causal role of group-level processes on these people’s action. Hall was pressured, particularly by Hansen, to continue. Krakauer survived because he climbed at the front of the group, and because others in the group took the responsibility for saving climbers lost in the storm.

Because of this so-called fundamental attribution error, when perceivers learn about a group member acting a certain way, they tend to assume that the individual freely chose that type of behavior, even when the action is largely determined by the norms of the group and the role that the individual has taken within the group. Perceivers are also often surprised when the same individual acts very differently when he or she changes groups, for they feel that personal, individualistic qualities are the primary causes of behavior, and that group-level process should play only a minor role in determining one’s outcomes. In fact, early researchers were not certain that studying groups would yield scientific insights beyond those generated by studies of the individuals who were members of the groups.

Contemporary group researchers, however, are convinced that if one wishes to understand individuals, one must understand groups. The lone individual, cut off from all groups, is a rarity, for most people live out their lives in groups, and these groups have a profound impact on individuals’ thoughts, feelings, and actions. Although people often consider their cognitive ruminations, including thoughts, decisions, attitudes, and values, to be private and personal, these cognitive processes are shaped by the groups to which they belong. Most people will base their estimates and opinions on the statements made by other group members rather than the evidence of their own senses. Groups prompt their members to endorse certain ideas and attitudes, and even the nonconformist will eventually take on the standards of the groups to which they belong. When people find they disagree with others in their group, they experience cognitive dissonance, and their thoughts change if they can find no other way to reduce this unpleasant mental state. People also process information collectively, through discussion and other group communication processes, and so such basic cognitive processes as planning, evaluating, judging, decision making, and problem solving are made, not by individuals, but by groups.

Groups also directly and indirectly influence members’ emotions. Members’ feelings about themselves and their identities depend on inclusion in social groups that sustain their sense of satisfaction and well-being. Groups create affectively rich relationships between people and they are often the source of the motivational drive needed to accomplish difficult, taxing goals. Emotions are also sometimes contagious in groups, with the feelings of one individual passing rapidly from one member of the group to the next. Researchers Stanley Schachter and Jerome Singer (1962) studied this process experimentally by elevating participants’ level of arousal (by injecting them with a dose of epinephrine) and then leaving them in a room with another subject. This other subject was actually a confederate, who deliberately acted as if he was happy or angry. The subjects, particularly when already aroused, tended to experience the same emotion the confederate displayed. Similarly, people in crowds and mobs often experience waves of contagious emotions, to the point that external observers often feel that such groups act as if they possess a shared, or collective, conscious. But even members of more subdued groups, such as work groups and sports teams, become more and more similar in their overall mood the longer they remain together.
Group influence is perhaps most conspicuous at the behavioral level. People, both knowingly and unwittingly, amend their actions and preferences to match the norms of their groups. Young children imitate the way their playmates dress, talk, and act. For older children the peer group becomes the primary determiner of behaviors, replacing the influence of the family. Groups also change people more dramatically, to the point that the behavior of a person in a group may have no connection to that person’s behavior when alone. Stanley Milgram (1963), for example, studied the strength of the group by asking volunteers to take part in what they thought was a study of learning. Unknown to them, their partner in the learning project was a member of the research staff, and he deliberately made many errors. After each mistake participants were told to deliver an increasingly powerful electrical shock to the learner. The learner did not actual receive any shocks, but he complained of great pain and eventually demanding he be released. Milgram found that the majority of the people he studied could not resist the authority’s orders, and that their obedience was stronger still when they were members of a group that did not question the authority’s orders. Similarly, individuals who join religious or political groups that stress secrecy, obedience to leaders, and dogmatic acceptance of unusual or atypical beliefs (sometimes called “cults”) often display fundamental and unusual changes in behavior. Some individuals are more group-oriented than others, and some groups are more influential in some cultures than others, but in general and across individuals, groups, and cultures, groups are powerful determiners of individuals’ thoughts, emotions, and actions.

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<th>Groups in Different Cultures and Communities</th>
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<td>One’s capacity to “see” groups varies depending on one’s cultural and community background. Western countries such as the U.S. and Great Britain lean towards individualism: the equality of separate individuals and the rights of the individual over the group. Individuals are the center of such societies, and their right to private property, to express themselves, and to engage in actions for their own personal gain are protected and even encouraged. Other, non-Western societies, in contrast, stress collectivism. Individuals in such societies think of themselves as group members first and individuals second, and so emphasize the unity of all people in their group rather than each person’s individuality. Social existence is centered on group relations, for it is the group that creates social obligations based on respect, trust, and a sense of community. Within the U.S., African Americans tend to be more group oriented than Whites, but men and women tend to be equal in their emphasis on groups.</td>
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Mystical Thinking about Groups. Even though people tend to overlook the influence of groups on a day-to-day basis, they nonetheless embrace a number of myths or fictions when they ponder groups, and these myths tend to ride off in wonderfully different directions.

First, people tend to think that groups are less stable than are individuals. When some negative or unusual event occurs—a riot, a crime, a blunder, or a disaster—then the usual emphasis on individuals is erased and replaced by a tendency to find the group guilty. People find it hard to believe that a single individual could act in an unusual way, but a group? Why not?

Second, even though they are often seen as ready to act oddly, groups are also thought to be wise, for we can put our faith in decision-making skills of a group. Say an important decision must be made. Do you want an individual to do it, or a group? Invariably, when the decision is an important one, such as the guilt or innocence of person, individuals decide to get a group together and ask them to make the call!

Third, groups are often thought to have amazing, magical properties. They are thought to have a collective consciousness, for example, as if members can link to one another telepathically. They are more powerful than hypnotists, for a hypnotized person can’t be told to do something their morals tell them not to do. But a group? A group, some think, can compel you to do practically anything. They can even motivate people
the lazy and disinterested among us. Take 3 unmotivated people, put them in a group, and what do you have? Three really unmotivated people. BUT most people hope that the group will work a transformative wonder; that no matter who is placed within the group, if the right leadership and design is put into place the individually incompetent members will become a cohesive, synergistic, a team.

Fourth, and most basically, groups are thought to be mysterious and unpredictable, because they and their processes are often unseen. The earliest psychologists, to explain group behavior, concluded that a “group mind” must overcome each individual. When adolescents engage in untoward behaviors, parents are surprised, for they cannot believe that “peer pressure” could be so strong. When prisoners of war confined by the Chinese during the Korean War refused liberation at the war’s end and decided to remain in Korea, most people assumed something extraordinary had been done to them: that the Chinese had somehow “brainwashed” them, removing their original thoughts and ideas and values and replacing them with new ones that changed them from democracy-lovers to communists. Yet, when researchers studied what the Chinese had done, all they could conclude was that the coercive persuasion methods they used were neither extraordinary nor all that effective. Despite years of pressure and physical deprivations, very few GIs remained behind, and those that did tended to be disillusioned with the American way of life before they were taken prisoner.

Because of these mistaken and exaggerated assumptions about groups, people often blame them whenever individuals act oddly, for we intuitively agree Nietzsche who concluded that "madness is the exception in individuals but the rule in groups". Yet, groups, on closer examine, are intriguing but not unpredictable. Like individuals, they typically develop over time in predictable ways, becoming more cohesive the longer they exist. They also develop patterns of relations, or structures, that regulate who does what in the group. We consider both the development of groups and their structures in the next two sections.

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**GROUP DEVELOPMENT**

Groups, like the individuals who comprise them, are living, growing systems. In the weeks between first joining together in Nepal to plan the expedition up Everest until the final day when the group disbanded, the Adventure Consultant climbers group changed dramatically. Throughout the ordeal conflicts surfaced and became submerged again, questions of authority surfaced and caused tension, and the group’s basic structure took one form after another. The group was never static but, instead, developed continually.

These changes follow a predictable pattern. In most groups the same sorts of issues arise over time, and once resolved the group can develop further. Bruce Tuckman maintains that this group development often involves five stages. In the *forming* phase the members become oriented toward one another. In the *storming* phase the group members find themselves in conflict, and some solution is sought to improve the group environment. In the *norming* phase standards for behavior and roles develop that regulate behavior. In the *performing* phase the group has reached a point where it can work as a unit to achieve desired goals, and the *adjourning* phase ends the sequence of development; the group disbands. Throughout these stages groups tend to oscillate between the task-oriented issues and the relationship issues, with members sometimes working hard but at other times strengthening their interpersonal bonds.

Individuals also experience change as they pass through the group. We don’t become full-fledged members of a group in an instant. Instead, we gradually become a part of the group and remain in the group until we leave it. Richard Moreland and John Levine's (1982) model of group socialization describes this process. During the investigation stage we are still outsiders: interested in joining the group, but not yet committed to it in any way. Once the group accepts us as a member, socialization begins: we learn the group's norms and take on different responsibilities depending on our roles.
Even though we are full-fledged members at this point, changes still occur. If the group changes, our roles and responsibilities change as well. During this maintenance phase we may have to learn new ways of doing things or accept responsibilities that we would rather avoid. If this maintenance is successful then we remain in this stage until the group or our membership ends as scheduled. If, however, we fail to adapt to changes appropriately, then group members may attempt resocialization: they remind us that, as group members, we must abide by the group’s norms. If they fail, then we will probably leave the group. In any case, once membership in the group is concluded we sometimes pass through yet another stage: remembrance. We are no longer members, but we still remember, sometimes with fondness, sometimes with regret, what membership in the group was like.

Studies of groups, and teams in particular, suggest that effective leaders are careful to intervene differently depending on where the group is in terms of its development. The leader should, for example, work hard to help the group establish clear and meaningful goals during the formation stage. Members of true teams should have the autonomy to develop the procedures and processes they will use to reach their goals over time, but they should nonetheless be given clear general goals to guide them during the formation process. Moreover, few groups are capable of spontaneously talking about the procedures, for they like to plunge immediately into the problem. Hence, the skilled leader should find ways to get the group to revisit issues of process and reconsider the methods that they typically use to get the group’s work accomplished.

Researchers in organizational settings have also noted that, in many cases, groups do not just progress smoothly through the basic stages of development, but that near the midpoint of the group’s existence the group will undergo a more essential change of some kind. Many groups are relaxed initially, for members recognize the early stages of the group’s life as a time for gradual development and structuring. When they reach their half-way point, however, groups often experience a “midlife crisis,” as members realize that their time together is slipping away and the time that once seemed so copious is now a scarce commodity.

**GROUP STRUCTURE**

During the long days and nights spent at a series of camps located higher and higher on Mount Everest the Adventure Consultants worked through the interpersonal conflicts and tension. Arguments were settled, hurt feelings forgotten, and competition for status and privileges were resolved as the group became more and more organized. Members came to agree on who made decisions and who had the most authority. They came to know the part they should play within the group, and the parts that others would play. Clear patterns of liking also formed, as members drifted into compatible subgroups who often hiked and tented together. These regularities are elements of group structure: the underlying pattern of relationships among members.

**Status.** Few small groups treat all members equally. Just as some group members are permitted to lead while others must follow, so some group members are afforded more authority than the rank and file. These stable status networks—these pecking orders or chains-of-command—are often hierarchical and centralized. In the climbing group, Hall and the other guides formed a coalition that controlled most of the group’s activities. The more experienced climbers, such as Krakauer, were also respected by the rest of the group, but the less experienced members exerted little influence over the others.

In many cases groups confer status on those who are exceptionally skilled and contribute the most to the group effort. In other cases, though, qualities that have little relevance to the aims of a group can also influence the rise to the top of the hierarchy. Unrecognized prejudices may prompt us to afford more status to men than to women, to Whites than to Blacks, and to older people than to younger people.

**Attraction.** Members of groups are not only linked one to another in status hierarchies, but also in networks of likes, dislikes, affection, and
even hatred. Within a group one or two individuals may become the most popular with the others; rejected members (outcasts) are disliked by nearly everyone; average members are liked by several others in the group; and neglected group members (isolates or "fringers") receive little attention at all from the group.

This network of likes and dislikes among the members is often called the group’s sociometric structure. This term derives from sociometry, which is a method for measuring social relationships in groups developed by researcher and theorist Jacob Moreno (1953). Researchers who use this method typically ask group members to identify who they like the most or dislike the most in their groups. Their choices are then summarized statistically or in a graph. Popular individuals are singled out by virtually all the others to be the target of much affection; isolates are neglected by most of the group; outcasts are rejected by the majority of the group; whereas the average members are liked by several others in the group.

Sociometric relations tend to be organized rather than random configurations of liking and disliking. Most attraction relations are reciprocal; if person A likes B then B likes A. They also tend to be balanced; the relations in groups usually fit together to form a coherent, unified whole. A dyad, for example, is balanced only if liking (or disliking) is mutual. Similarly, triads and larger groups are balanced only if (a) all the relationships are positive or (b) an even number of negative relationships occur in the group. Conversely, groups are unbalanced if they contain an odd number of negative relations. Just as some people have more status than others, some group members are better liked than others.

**Communication.** The flow of information from one person to another in groups is often structured by the group’s communication network. Hall, for example, sent information to and received information from a variety of sources, including the clients, his staff and guides, the local guides that he hired (called Sherpas), and the members of other groups of climbers. Although the guides sometimes spoke directly to the clients, most of their statements about the expedition were directed at Hall. This type of network is centralized rather than decentralized since most information flows through one person. These types of networks tend to be most efficient so long as the communication rate is modest. If the number of messages routed through the central member becomes too great, or if the central hub in the network stops processing information and relaying it on to others (which was the case in the Adventure Consultant’s group), then this type of network can break down.

Members of groups often take these networks of association for granted, but one overlooks these interpersonal ties at one’s own peril. When people first join a group, they spend much of their time initially trying to come to terms with their links to other members. In group meetings, the opinions of those with higher status carry more weight than those of the rank-and-file members. When several members form a subgroup within the larger group, they exert more influence on the rest of the group. And when people manage to place themselves at the hub of the group’s information exchange patterns, their influence over others also increases. If you had to choose only one aspect of a group to study, you would probably learn the most by studying its structure.

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**GROUP LEADERSHIP**

Group roles structure interactions by specifying the general behaviors expected of people who occupy different positions within the group. Once people take on particular roles, such as leader, follower, or critic, they must play their part. Hall, for example, was the group leader, so he gave the orders, asked the questions, and made the final decisions. Andy Harris, in contrast, was a guide, and so he was responsible for carrying supplies, placing climbing lines, and helping the clients. The clients followed orders as best they could.

The role of leader is common one in most groups. The leader is the individual in the group who guides others in their pursuits, often by organizing, directing, coordinating, supporting, and motivating their efforts. In some cases the
group’s leader is formally recognized, as in the case of the Everest climbers who recognized Hall as their leader. However, in many groups the leader gains authority implicitly, as other group members come to rely on him or her to guide the group.

**Leadership is a relationship.** Although trait-level analyses of the unique personal qualities of leaders and the close connection between these traits and followers’ outcomes often ignore where leadership occurs, when leadership is viewed as a social relationships involving leaders and their followers then the interpersonal context of leadership must be considered. The connection of group and leader is a reciprocal one: the way the leader organizes, directs, coordinates, supports, and motivates others in the pursuit of shared goals influences the group and its dynamics, but the leader’s own actions and reactions are shaped by the group as well.

Kurt Lewin, Ronald Lippitt, and Ralph White (1937) were among the first researchers to affirm this close connection between leadership and group dynamics empirically. They studied boys working in small groups on hobby projects. A young man was appointed the leader of each group, and this leader was trained to adopt one of three different styles of leadership. The autocratic leader made all the decisions for the group without consulting the boys. He gave the boys orders, criticized them, and remained aloof from the group. The participatory, democratic leader explained long term goals and steps to be taken to reach the goals and rarely gave the groups orders. The laissez faire leader provided information on demand, but he did not offer advice, criticism, or guidance spontaneously.

These different methods of leading significant influenced the groups’ dynamics. Groups with autocratic, directive leaders spent more time working than did the other groups—particularly those with the laissez faire leader. This productivity, however, dropped precipitously when the autocratic leader left the room, where as those groups with a participative leader worked diligently even when the leader was not present. The groups with an autocratic leader also displayed higher levels of conflict and hostility, as well as demands for attention, more destructiveness, and a greater tendency to scapegoat one or more members.

The basic implications of these findings—that leadership processes substantially influence a wide range of group processes—forms the basis of most theories of leadership and has been reaffirmed in both applied and basic studies of laboratory and bona fide groups. Although some have questioned the impact of leaders on their followers, leaders profoundly influence the process that occur in groups—hopefully for good, but in many cases in profoundly negative ways. Groups of individuals, when they face an emergency, often fail to respond; but if a leader is present in the group this bystander effect becomes less likely. Groups, when discussing solutions to problems, tend to spend too much time discussing information shared by many members—unless a leader is present in the group who controls the group’s tendency to focus on shared information. On the other hand, leaders can also cause more problems for their followers than they solve. Studies of people working in business settings, for example, suggest employees are rarely happy with their leaders. Survey routinely report that 65%–75% of the members of groups and work units in organizations, when asked to identify the worst aspect of their job, point to their immediate boss. Even more disappointing, group leaders can take their groups in the wrong direction, with the result that the group will make poor decision, act inappropriately, or even (as in the case of the mountaineers), perish.

But the direction of influence is not one-directional. Just as leaders shape group processes, so many core group-level processes significantly influence leadership. Fred Fiedler’s (1978) contingency theory, for example, assumes that the favorability of the leadership situation is determined by the type of task the group faces and leaders’ position power, but it is the group’s acceptance of the leader’s influence that is the key factor determining the success of a task versus relational leader. Not only are situations that differ in favorability more propitious for one style of leadership than another, but in many cases skilled leaders will change their basic style of
leadership depending on the group situation. Leaders may also change their approaches to leading unintentionally, as they respond to the subtle pressures of the group’s dynamics. Studies of political leaders, for example, find that time and again even very powerful and very experienced leaders are substantially influenced by the direct and indirect influence attempts of their subordinates. Indeed, some of the best leaders deliberately structure their groups so that they can be influenced by their advisors.

Studies of leaders in all kinds of group situations--flight crews, politics, schools, military units, and religious groups--suggest that groups prosper when guided by good leaders. The ingredients for “effective leadership,” however, are often debated, for leadership often involves finding the right balance between (a) keeping the members working at their tasks and improving relationships and (b) providing guidance without robbing members of their autonomy.

**Leadership Styles.** The leadership role includes, in many groups, two basic components: task orientation and relationship orientation. Task leadership focuses on the problem at hand, including defining problems for the group, establishing communication networks, providing evaluative feedback, planning, motivating action, coordinating members’ actions, and facilitating goal attainment by proposing solutions and removing barriers. Relationship leadership focuses on the quality of the relationships among the members of the group. Even in groups that exist to complete tasks or solve problems, leaders must often boost morale, increase cohesiveness, reduce interpersonal conflict, improve leader-follower rapport, and show their concern and consideration for group members (Lord, 1977).

Which leader will be more effective: the one who can get the job done or the one who with relationship skills? Researchers and theorists agree on one conclusion: It depends on the nature of the group situation. Fred Fiedler’s contingency theory of leadership, for example, assumes that most people are, by nature, either task-oriented leaders or relationship-oriented leaders; few can shift from one style of leadership to the other. Importantly, however, different styles work better in different situations. Of the group situation is very favorable for the leader or very unfavorable for the leader (say, because the group members do not get along with the leader and the leader has little power), the task oriented leader will perform most effectively. In contrast, the relationship leader should be more effective in moderately favorable or moderately unfavorable situations.

Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard’s situational model of leadership, in contrast, assumes that leaders can be both task oriented and relationship oriented. Thus, rather than arguing for two basic types of leaders, Hersey and Blanchard view leadership as a four fold typology. They also believe that skilled leaders can modulate their style so that it best matches the needs of the group. They believe that leaders, to be effective, must gauge the developmental stage of their group, and make certain that they meet the unique needs that emerge at different times. Newly formed groups, groups beginning a new project, or a group with many new members are immature, and they require a high task/low relationship leader. As the group matures and begins working adequately on the task, the leader can increase relationship behavior and adopt a high/high style. Still later in the group’s development, the leader can ease off on both types of leadership, starting first with task emphasis. In moderately mature groups the high relationship/low task style is most effective, and in fully mature work groups a low/low, laissez faire style is appropriate. Thus, an effective leader must display four different leadership styles as the group moves through its life cycle: telling, selling, participating, and delegating. Unlike Fiedler, they recommend that leader’s adjust their style until it fits the situation.

Situational leadership theory’s emphasis on flexibility as a cardinal trait in a leader is consistent with studies that have identified people who seem to rise to positions of leadership no matter what the setting. Stephen Zaccaro, Roseanne Foti, and David Kenny (1991), for example, rotated people through a series of groups that worked at various tasks. Some of the tasks called for a leader who was good with people and
others were made easier if someone in the group was task-oriented. Whenever one task was completed, the researchers dissolved the groups and reformed them before assigning new tasks to each group. Across all the groups and all the different tasks, the same individuals tended to emerge as the group leaders. Later analysis indicated that these individuals were able to alter their behaviors to fit the demands of the situation. If their group was working on a task that required good “people skills,” they become more interpersonally oriented. But when the group needed a directive, task-oriented leader, these individuals stressed the task. These findings suggest that flexibility may be one of the most important qualities to look for in an effective leader.

**Participatory Leadership.** Leaders differ in how much control they exert over the group. Some leaders, like Rob Hall of the Adventure Consultants, make nearly all the group’s decisions. Others, in contrast, share their authority with the other members of the groups, recognizing that leadership is power with people rather than over people.

Which leader is most effective: the one who takes charge and directs the group with a strong hand or the one who consults with group members and lets them share the reins of leadership? The study conducted by Lewin, Lippitt, and White described earlier suggest that directive (autocratic) and participatory (democratic) leaders each have strengths and weakness. The strongly directive leader often succeeds in pushing the group to high levels of productivity, although at an interpersonal cost. The participatory leader, in contrast, increases feelings of satisfaction and members' involvement in the group. Therefore, shrewd leaders should plan their management style accordingly depending on the situation they face and the goals they wish to attain. If, for example, you are put in charge of a group of people who aren't the least bit interested in the working hard to attain the group's goals, then a strong, directive style may work best. An autocratic approach is also warranted when the issues to be settled are minor ones, the group's acceptance won't impact them in any way, and when the group members are, themselves, autocratic. In general, however, your group members will be much happier if you involve them in their group decisions. The decisions, too, will probably be better if you yourself are puzzled by the issues and they have information that might be relevant.

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**Reactions to Men and Women Who Lead**

Who is more likely to rise to the top and be selected the leader of a group? Who, among a group of coworkers, will be recognized by other members as the best person to guide the group in the pursuit of its goals? Who do those who already hold positions of leadership in an organization tend to prefer when they must select from among their employees those they feel may grow into effective leaders? In these cases, those who emerge as leaders or are selected for leadership roles tend to differ physically and psychologically from their subordinates; they are older, taller, and heavier than the average group member. They are generally more accomplished at the tasks facing the group and they tend to talk more than the average member. Leaders are outgoing rather than shy and dominant rather than submissive. Leaders, too, are more often men rather than women. All of the teams that climb Everest are led by men, not women.

Even though the gender gap in leadership has narrowed in recent years, it has not closed. More men than women work outside the home, and their overrepresentation in organizations and business settings provides them with far more leadership opportunities than are available to women. Even though the number of women working in managerial roles has risen steadily over the years, men hold a near monopoly on high level leadership positions; women make up about 5% of management and only 1% of upper management. Women leaders routinely report being treated negatively by their subordinates and superiors, and some also express less confidence in their leadership abilities. The glass ceiling still blocks women’s climb to leadership positions in many organizational settings.
This gender difference also shapes men and women’s actions in small group settings. Men are five times more likely to enact leadership behaviors than women in small, mixed sex leaderless groups and so are more likely to emerge as leaders. Both leaders and subordinates perceive female leaders to be less dominant than male leaders. The lone man in an otherwise all female group often becomes the leader, whereas the lone woman in an otherwise all male group has little influence. The tendency for men to dominate women in informal discussion groups was obtained even when the men and women were all personally committed to equality for men and women and when the women in the group were more dominant, dispositionally, than the men.

Like many social psychological processes, individual perceptions—even though mistaken—generate a series of reactions that fundamentally shape social outcomes. By thinking “man” when also thinking “leaders,” group members mistakenly misjudge the strengths of their co-workers. As Alice Eagly’s social role theory explains, people in virtually all cultures, when asked to describe women, speak of their expressive qualities, including nurturance, emotionality, and warmth. They expect a “she” to be sentimental, affectionate, sympathetic, soft hearted, talkative, gentle, and feminine. When describing men, they stress their instrumental qualities, including productivity, energy, and strength. But when group members are asked to describe the qualities needed in a leader, their implicit leadership theories prompt them to emphasize the instrumental side of leadership. In consequence, the expectations associated with leadership mesh with the male sex-role stereotype, but the leadership role is inconsistent with widely held stereotypes about women.

Groups usually exist for a reason. A team strives to outperform other teams in competitions. A study group wants to raise the grades of all of the students who are members. A jury must make decisions about guilt or innocence. The members of the congregation seek religious and spiritual enlightenment. In each case, the members of the group united in their pursuit of common goals. In groups, we solve problems, create products, create standards, communicate knowledge, have fun, perform arts, create institutions, and even ensure our safety from attacks by other groups. Put simply, groups make it easier to attain our goals. For this reason, much of the world’s work is done by groups rather than by individuals.

Groups do so many things that their activities can be classified in a variety of ways. Joseph E. McGrath’s circumplex model of group tasks, for example, distinguishes among four basic group goals: Generating, Choosing, Negotiating, and Executing. When groups work at generating tasks they strive to concoct the strategies they will use to accomplish their goals (planning tasks) or create altogether new ideas and approaches to their problems (creativity tasks). When choosing, groups make decisions about issues that have correct solutions (intellective tasks) or problems that can be answered in many ways (decision-making tasks). When groups are negotiating they must resolve differences of opinion among the members of the group regarding their goals or their decisions (cognitive-conflict tasks) or resolve competitive disputes among members (mixed-motive tasks). The most behaviorally oriented groups actually do things. Executing groups compete against other groups (contest/battles) and perform (performances). Some groups perform tasks from nearly all of McGrath’s categories, whereas others concentrate on only one subset of goals.

Groups are particularly useful when it comes to making a decision, for groups can draw on more resources than a lone individual. Rob Hall, the leader of the Adventure Consultant’s group, may know a great deal about high-altitude climbs, but his knowledge is far surpassed by the combined memories of the other seasoned mountaineers in the group. Groups can also generate more ideas and possible solutions by discussing the problem. Hall may think of only one
way to solve a problem the group confronts, but after talking with the other guides he may recognize new alternatives that he had overlooked. Groups, too, can evaluate the options that they generate during discussion more objectively. Before accepting a solution, a group may require that a certain number of people favor it, or that it meets some other standard of acceptability. People generally feel that a group’s decision will be superior to an individual’s decision.

Groups, however, do not always make good decisions. Juries sometimes render verdicts that run counter to the evidence presented. Community groups take radical stances on issues before thinking through all the ramifications. Military strategists concoct plans that seem, in retrospect, ill-conceived and short-sighted. The Everest group’s decision to continue to climb long after the deadline to turn around came and went had fatal consequences. Why do groups sometimes fail? Two processes that can warp a group’s decisions—group polarization and the shared information bias—are considered below.

**Polarization in Groups.** On the night before the climb the members of the Adventure Consultants discussed their chances for safely reaching the peak. Hall and the others recognized that they were facing a dangerous situation, for one out of every five people who attempt to climb the mountain dies. They also realized that it was just a matter of time before one of the teams of climbers encountered disaster, and many would be killed. The group, though, decided that they should throw caution to the wind and make the climb.

The climbers’ decision is consistent with studies of group’s making decisions that involve risk. Common sense notions suggest that groups exert a moderating, subduing effect on their members. However, when researchers looked at groups closely, they discovered that a surprising shift toward more extreme decisions rather than less extreme decisions after group interaction. Moreover, this group shift carried over when they gave their private choices following the group discussion.

Discussion, it turns out, doesn't moderate people's judgments after all. Instead, it leads to group polarization: judgments made after group discussion will be more extreme in the same direction as the average of individual judgments made prior to discussion. If they feel that taking risks is more acceptable than exercising caution, then they will become riskier after a discussion. In France, for example, where people generally like their government but dislike Americans, group discussion improved their attitude towards their government but exacerbated their negative opinions of Americans. Similarly, prejudiced people who discussed racial issues with other prejudiced individuals became even more negative. Conversely, when mildly prejudiced persons discuss racial issues with other mildly prejudiced individuals, they became less prejudiced.

**Shared Information Bias.** The climbers who composed the Adventure Consultants team had a wide-range of experience and knowledge about high-altitude climbing, and they often shared this knowledge with each other in extensive discussions. All too often, however, these conversations focused on information that the majority of the climbers already knew. Instead of revealing to one another unique bits of information gleaned from years of personal experience climbing mountains, the group members discussed ideas that they shared in common with the other climbers.

During most group discussions members are supposed to share their private ideas and concerns. All too often, however, groups spend much of their discussion time examining shared information—details that two or more group members know in common—rather than unshared information. This shared information bias is an inconsequential one if the group is discussing a problem that is well-known to all group members or one with a solution that is obvious. If, however, the group must have access to the unshared information if it is going to make a good decision, then the bias can lead the group astray. If a group is working on a problem where the shared information suggests that Alternative A is correct, but the unshared information favors Alternative B, then the group will only discover this so-called hidden profile if it discusses the unshared information.
Groupthink. Groups sometimes make spectacularly bad decisions. In 1961 a special advisory committee to President John F. Kennedy planned and implemented a covert invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs that ended in total disaster. In 1986 NASA carefully, and incorrectly, decided to launch the Challenger space shuttle in temperatures that were too cold. The Everest team decided to continue climbing late into the afternoon.

Irving Janis, intrigued by these kinds of blundering groups, carried out a number of case studies of such groups: the military experts that planned the defense of Pearl Harbor; Kennedy’s Bay-of-Pigs planning group; the presidential team that escalated the war in Vietnam. Each group, he concluded, fell prey to a distorted style of thinking that rendered the group members incapable of making a rational decision. Janis labeled this syndrome groupthink: "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (1982, p. 9).

To Janis, groupthink is a disease that infects healthy groups, rendering them inefficient and unproductive. And like the physician who searches for symptoms that distinguish one disease from another, Janis has identified a number of symptoms that occur in groupthink situations. These danger signals, which should serve to warn members that they may be falling prey to groupthink, include overestimating the group's skills and wisdom, biased perceptions and evaluations of other groups and people who are outside of the group, strong conformity pressures within the group, and poor decision making methods. On Everest, many members of other climbing teams expressed their concerns about taking unskilled clients up the mountain. They were particularly worried that the demands these climbers made on the guides and sherpas would exhaust the team, and that they would make mistakes. The members of the Adventure Consultants, however, were so certain of their skill that they dismissed these concerns as unreasonable. They rationalized the risks by thinking their expertise made up for the lack of skill of the novices.

Most of us belong to at least one group that must make decisions from time to time: a community group that needs to choose a fund raising project; a union or employee group that must ratify a new contract; a family that must discuss your college plans; the staff of a high school discussing ways to deal with the potential for violence during football games. Could these kinds of groups experience groupthink? Yes, if the symptoms of groupthink discussed above are present, combined with other contributing causal factors, such as cohesiveness, isolation, biased leadership, and stress.

THE VALUE OF GROUPS

In 1996 the Adventure Consultant’s group formed, stormed, normed, and performed by climbing to the top of the world’s tallest mountain. The group did not survive that climb, however, and the one that set off for the summit at midnight on April 10th never returned. Some of the individual members managed to descend from the peak but the group itself was gone.

For centuries, philosophers and scholars have debated the relative value of groups. Groups are often the arena for profound interpersonal conflicts that end in violence and aggression. Even though group members may cooperate with one another, they may also engage in competition as they strive to outdo one another. When individuals are members of vary large groups, such as crowds, they sometimes engage in behavior that they would never undertake if they were acting individually. Many of the most misguided decisions were not made by lone, misguided individuals but by groups of people who, despite working together, still manage to make a disastrous decision. And even though people tend to work together in groups, in many cases these groups are far less productive than they should be, given the talents and energies of the individuals in them. Given these problems with groups, maybe we would all do better without them.

Such a proposal, though, is nonsense. Yes, groups can lead us astray and contribute to negative experiences, but we could not survive without them. Membership in groups is highly rewarding, for it combines the pleasures of interpersonal relations with goal strivings. Groups cre-
ate relationships between people, and in many cases these connections are more intimate, more enduring, and more sustaining than connections formed between friends and lovers. Groups provide members with a sense of identity, for the self is not based only on personal traits and qualities (e.g., “I am outgoing”) but also on group memberships (e.g., “I am an American”). Groups also provide members with the means to accomplish goals that they could never achieve alone, they provide members with support and guidance, and they are often the means of acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities. They are indispensable. As Aristotle concluded:

The individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something in nature that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god.