

not appear overly dogmatic or rigid, and are willing to compromise. Minority views also are more likely to have an influence on the majority if they offer a compelling argument against the majority's position, the minority position is held by more than one group member, and there is not an obvious selfish explanation for the minority position (e.g., the minority would benefit financially).

Even under the best of circumstances, a minority viewpoint may not be accepted. And even if accepted privately, publicly expressed acceptance may be hindered by the fear of disapproval by the larger group or powerful leaders. Nevertheless, there is good evidence that even if a minority position is not fully or even partially adopted immediately, the process may stimulate more in-depth and creative thinking about the issues under consideration and can lead to more long-term shifts in opinions.

Information Processing in Groups

To help explain certain decision-making processes, some researchers conceptualize decision-making groups as collective information processors. One prominent model in this vein considers situations in which different members of a group are responsible for different domains of knowledge. Their combined cognitive effort of collecting, analyzing, and communicating information is termed a *transactive* (or collective) *memory system* (TMS). In short, a TMS is a cooperative division of mental labor. Research suggests that such systems have limited benefits with newly established or short-term groups but do benefit long-term groups. It seems that as a group stays together over time, the members become more proficient at coordinating their cognitive efforts, more trusting in their mutual reliance, and typically improve in their decision-making performance.

Relatedly, the information sampling model was developed, in part, to examine the commonly held assumption that group members tend to pool their unique bits of knowledge and this leads to higher-quality decisions. Indeed, studies confirm that the extent to which unshared information (information held by only one or a few members of the group) is discussed is a good predictor of ultimate decision quality. However, consistent with the model's predictions, studies have also found that groups tend to spend an inordinate amount of time discussing shared

information (information that each member of the group possessed) and very little time discussing unshared information. This information sampling bias leads to faulty decision-making outcomes (sometimes referred to as the *common knowledge effect*). There is some evidence that the sampling bias can be mitigated if the decision task is intellectual rather than judgmental and if the group is motivated to generate the correct solution.

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See also Decision Making; Group Dynamics; Group Polarization; Groupthink; Minority Social Influence; Research Methods; Transactive Memory

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GROUP DYNAMICS

Definition

Group dynamics are the influential actions, processes, and changes that take place in groups. Individuals often seek personal objectives independently of others, but across a wide range of settings and situations, they join with others in groups. The processes that take place within these groups—such as pressures to conform, the development of norms and roles, differentiation of leaders from followers, collective goal-strivings, and conflict—substantially influence members' emotions, actions, and thoughts. Kurt Lewin, widely recognized as the founding theorist of the field, used the term

group dynamics to describe these group processes, as well as the scientific discipline devoted to their description and analysis.

History and Background

People have wondered at the nature of groups and their dynamics for centuries, but only in the past 100 years did researchers from psychology, sociology, and related disciplines begin seeking answers to questions about the nature of groups and their processes: Why do humans affiliate with others in groups? How do groups and their leaders hold sway over members? To what extent is human behavior determined by instinct rather than reflection and choice? What factors give rise to a sense of cohesion, esprit de corps, and a marked distrust for those outside the group?

The results of these studies suggest that groups are the setting for a variety of individual and interpersonal processes. Some of these processes—such as collaborative problem solving, social identity development, coordination of effort and activities in the pursuit of shared goals, and a sense of belonging and cohesion—promote the adjustment and welfare of members, whereas others—the loss of motivation in groups (social loafing), conformity, pressures to obey, and conflict—can be detrimental for members. Some of these processes also occur within the group (intra-group processes), whereas others occur when one group encounters one or more other groups (intergroup processes). Because groups are found in all cultures, including hunting–gathering, horticultural, pastoral, industrial, and postindustrial societies, group processes also influence societal and cultural processes.

Interpersonal Processes in Groups

The processes that take place within small groups vary from the subtle and ubiquitous (found everywhere) to the blatant and exceedingly rare. Initially, as groups form, social forces draw people to the group and keep them linked together in relationships. These *formative processes* work to create a group from formerly independent, unrelated individuals. In some cases groups are deliberately formed for some purpose or goal, but in other cases the same attraction processes that create friendships and more intimate relationships create groups.

Once the group forms, *normative processes* promote the development of group traditions and norms that determine the kinds of actions that are permitted

or condemned, who talks to whom, who has higher status than others, who can be counted on to perform particular tasks, and whom others look to for guidance and help. These regularities combine to form the roles, norms, and intermember relations that organize and stabilize the group. When the group becomes cohesive, membership stabilizes, the members report increased satisfaction, and the group's internal dynamics intensify. Members of groups and collectives also tend to categorize themselves as group members and, as a result, identify strongly with the group and their fellow group members. These *social identity processes* result in changes in self-conception, as individualistic qualities are suppressed and group-based, communal qualities prevail.

As interactions become patterned and members become more group-centered, their response to *social influence processes* is magnified. Group members are, by definition, interdependent: Members can influence others in the group, but others can influence them as well. As a result, individuals often change when they join a group, as their attitudes and actions align to match those of their fellow group members. Solomon Asch, in his studies of majority influence, found that these influence processes exert a powerful influence on people in groups; approximately one third of his subjects went along with the majority's incorrect judgments. Stanley Milgram's research also demonstrated a group's influence over its members. Volunteers who thought they were taking part in a study of learning were ordered to give painful shocks to another participant. (No shocks were actually administered.) Milgram discovered that the majority of people he tested were not able to resist the orders of the authority who demanded that they comply.

Groups are not only influence systems but also performance systems. Group members strive to coordinate their efforts for the attainment of group and individual goals, and these *performance processes* determine whether the group will succeed or fail to reach its goals. Robert Freed Bales, by observing the interactions of people meeting in face-to-face groups, identified two common core behavioral processes. One set of behaviors pertained to the social relationships among members. The other set, however, concerned the task to be accomplished by the group. These two constellations of behaviors are also core elements of *leadership processes*, for group leaders strive to improve the quality of relations among members in the group as well as ensure that the group completes its tasks efficiently and effectively.

Conflict processes are also omnipresent, both within the group and between groups. During periods of intragroup conflict, group members often express dissatisfaction with the group, respond emotionally, criticize one another, and form coalitions. If unresolved, the conflict may eventually result in the dissolution of the group. During periods of intergroup conflict, the group may exchange hostilities with other groups. Competition for scarce resources is a frequent cause of both intragroup and intergroup conflict, but the competition–hostility link is much stronger when groups compete against groups rather than when individuals compete against individuals (the discontinuity effect).

The Field of Group Dynamics

Lewin used the term *group dynamics* to describe the way groups and individuals act and react to changing circumstances, but he also used the phrase to describe the scientific discipline devoted to the study of these dynamics. Group dynamics is not a prescriptive analysis of how groups should be organized—emphasizing, for example, rules of order, democratic leadership, or high member satisfaction. Nor does it stress the development of social skills through group learning or the uses of groups for therapeutic purposes. Rather, group dynamics is an attempt to subject the many aspects of groups to scientific analysis through the construction of theories and the rigorous testing of these theories through empirical research.

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See also Groups, Characteristics of; Leadership; Social Identity Theory

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social influence within a group. This influence may be based on some social category or on interpersonal interaction among group members. On one hand, if we consider the case of athletic teams, a student at a university that participates in popular forms of competition such as football or basketball may identify with his or her team during contests with rival schools (“We really rocked in the Banana Bowl Classic. We took on all comers and whipped them!”). Classic rivalries such as Michigan versus Ohio State in football or Duke versus North Carolina in basketball are excellent examples of instances that produce strong identification based on a social category.

On the other hand, students can identify with a group created to conduct experiments in an animal learning laboratory course. By working together closely, students may come to identify with their lab group (“We finally finished our lab report and I bet it ranks among the best in the class!”). Although group identification is not always based on competition, identification is based on social comparison. These examples serve as clear illustrations of the “us versus them” experience that sometimes accompanies the identification process in intergroup situations.

Research History

Historically, social psychologists have studied social influence processes relative to whether individual or group outcomes are maximized. Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander suggested that relations among individuals in a group make them interdependent on one another. Harold Kelley and John Thibaut found that relations among members of a group were more often than not a function of the basis and outcome of interpersonal exchanges. In this light, social comparison, norms of exchange, and communication can forge common bonds among group members. Friendship groups are one example of how social influence processes produce identification.

In contrast to this dynamic view, John Turner offered that self-categorization theory provided a powerful explanation of when and why members identify with groups. From this perspective, people join groups that represent unique and sometimes powerful social categories. Members are attracted to and influenced by the behaviors of such groups. Consider, for example, the political situation of Israel and the Palestinians. Being Jewish or Arabic in this part of the world comes with a set of cultural, religious, and attitudinal expectations that create consistency within each group and

GROUP IDENTITY

Definition

Group identity refers to a person’s sense of belonging to a particular group. At its core, the concept describes