SYSTEM NEEDS OF GROUPS

Concepts to understanding groups

**Group**: A small, face-to-face collection of persons who interact to accomplish some purpose.

Groups operate in simultaneously on two levels:
1. **Task level**: Concerned with the accomplishment of the concrete goals of the group.
2. **Process dimension**: Concerned with the socioemotional needs of the task force members

**Group goal**: A place the group would like to be.

**Membership**
- **Formal or full psychological membership**: We have invested ourselves significantly in the group and its goals; we feel a high degree of commitment to the group’s goals and to the other group members.
- **Marginal members**: Are not willing to invest themselves fully in the group. They may do what is necessary to remain a member of the group, but only what is minimally necessary.
- **Aspiring member**: One who is not formally a member of a group but wishes to be a member. As an aspiring member we might identify strongly with the goals of the group, but we may not be able to become a formal member of the group for a variety of reasons.

**Leadership**: An interaction between two of more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectation of the members.

Leadership styles:
1. **Democratic**: group decision making, active member involvement, honest praise and criticism, and comradeship.
2. **Autocratic**: domineering and hierarchical leader behavior
3. **Laissez-faire**: uninvolved, non-directive approach to leading.

**Traits**: Suggests that leaders are born.

**Situational leadership**: Suggests that leaders emerge out of the requirements of a particular situation.

**Positional leadership**: Suggests that leaders are created by the positions they hold.

**Functional Leadership**: Suggests that leadership is simply behavior that assists a group to achieve its goals.

Functions for goal-directed leadership:
1. **Task or product-oriented**: to help the group select and move toward common outcomes.
2. **Maintenance, process, or socioemotional**: help the group move forward as a group.
3. **Individualistic**: sets of behaviors that serve the needs of individuals, often at the expense of the well-being of the group.

**Roles**: Expectations about what is appropriate behavior for persons in particular positions.

**Role conflict**: The disparity which an individual experiences among competing roles.

**Norms**: Group’s common beliefs regarding appropriate behavior for members. They help members know what to expect of others and what is expected of them.

**Conformity**: Bringing one’s behavior into alignment with a group’s expectations.

**Deviance**: Violation of “norms or rules of behavior”.
Idiosyncrasy credit: The potential for individual’s to behaviorally deviate from group norms without being sanctioned and as the positively disposed impression’s a person acquires as a member of a group.

Groupthink: A mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ striving for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action… a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgement that results from in-group pressures.
- Groupthink is a term used to indicate when the outcome of pressure to conform results in a decision by the group that has a negative outcome.

Teamthink: A way to prevent groupthink.
1. Encouragement of divergent views
2. Open expression of concerns/ideas
3. Awareness of limitations/threats
4. Recognition of member’s uniqueness
5. Discussion of collective doubts

Methodical decision-making: Another mechanism for avoiding groupthink.
- Ensure that the group adheres to a highly structured and systematic decision-making process by promising constructive criticism, nonconformity, and open-mindedness within the decision-making group.

Agendas:
- Surface: Individuals voice their individual agendas for the group.
- Hidden: When agendas are not brought to the surface.

Needs of a Group

Trust: Being able to rely on the integrity, ability, or character of a person in a group.

Communication: The exchange of thoughts, messages, or information, as by speech, signals, writing or behavior by group members effectively.

Cohesiveness: A bond between members of a group.

Organization: Arranging parts to form a whole, to put a system into working order.

Shared resources: Being able, for the individual members, to bring their personal resources/experiences to the group for the benefit of the group.

Boundaries: The parts of the system can be differentiated from the environment in which the system exists.

Cooperation: Members of a group working together to achieve a goal.

Conflict resolution: Being able to, as a group, come up with a solution to conflicting issues effectively.

Role expectations: Everyone in the group knowing what their particular role is and what their duties are.

Safe environment: A physical or social environment in which you feel comfortable or safe as a group.

Fully functioning component parts: Each individual in the group being able to use their role to its capacity to help the group function effectively.

Understanding the interrelatedness of the larger environment, the group itself, the members of the group and their needs.
Social Systems Concepts

**System:** An organized whole made up of components that interact in a way distinct from their interaction with other entities and which endures over some period of time.

**Holon:** All social systems, large or small, are simultaneously a part of other systems and a whole in themselves.

**Focal system:** System of primary concern.

**Subsystems:** The focal system is composed of the parts and other entire social systems.

**Suprasystem:** Environment surrounding and influencing the focal system.

**Energy:** Capacity for action, action, or the power to effect change.

**Synergy:** The ability to use energy to create new energy.

**Entropy:** A system that is losing energy faster than it is creating or importing it.

**Linkage:** Exchanging energy with other systems across their boundaries in order to survive.

**Hierarchy:** The particular order in which system parts are arranged.

**Differentiation:** A division of labor among system parts.

**Specialization:** A division of labor in which certain parts can perform certain functions.

**Socialization:** The process of teaching new members the rules by which the larger group operates. Involves imparting to new members the knowledge, values, and skills according to which they are expected to operate.

Submitted by Jennifer Jerome October 31, 2005