How people behave and perform in a group psychology essay

Introduction

Group members do things to and with each other. If you had watched the French artists, you would have seen them offering one another advice, exchanging stories about their own hardships, and asking for reactions to their work (Forsyth, 1999 : 7).

Regardless of the group setting, group membership generally implies some form of social interaction among the members (Bonner, 1959; Homans, 1950; Stogdill, 1959).

Thus, to understand individuals, we must necessarily understand their groups. Groups are the basic building blocks of society, understanding groups, then, is the key to understanding ourselves, other people, and society (Forsyth, 1999).

This essay focuses on the analyses of how working in a group can be both psychologically awarding as well as demanding for the individual by referring to how social support, group norms, peer pressure, conflicts, unclear individual accountability, the various advantages and disadvantages of working in a group for the individual, theories and research on groups and as well as various aspects of working in a group.

What is a group?

According to (Forsyth, 1999) there are various features to consider when trying to get a good definition of a group, such as communication, influence, interaction, psychological significance, interrelations e. t. c

(Homans, 1950, p. 1) defines as a number of persons who communicates with one another, often over a span of time, and who are few enough so that each person is able to communicate with all the others, not at second hand, through other people, but face-to-face"

(Johnson, 1995, p. 125) defines a group as a social system involving regular interaction among members and a common group identity. This means that groups have a sense of " weness" that enables members to identify themselves as belonging to a distinct entity"

Every group is unique in some many ways. A band of artists like the impressionists will never exist again, for the painters in the group were unique in their artistry and outlook. The players from the stranded rugby team, in its struggle to survive, did something that few other groups perform strange rituals, but the People's Temple outstripped them all by committing suicide (Forsyth, 1999).

These groups despite their distinctive characteristics also possessed properties and dynamics that are common to all groups Forsyth, 1999).

When we study a group, we must go beyond its unique qualities by considering characteristics common to most groups, including interaction, structure, cohesiveness, social identity, and goals (Borgatta, Cottrell, & Meyer, 1956; Delamater, 1974; Hare, 1976; Mullen, 1987a, 1990; Turner, 1985).

The Individual and the group

Why do people respond so negatively when others exclude them? Why do people avoid isolation, monitor their acceptance in groups, and question their self-worth when others shun them? Why are most societies organized around small, face-to-face groups? (Forsyth, 1999). A functional perspective assumes that the profound tendency for human to gather in groups reflects the usefulness of groups to their members. Individuals in groups can secure advantages and avoid disadvantages that would plague the lone individual (Mackie & Goethals, 1987; Streobe & Streobe, 1996; Zander, 1985).

WHAT DO GROUPS DO FOR THEIR MEMBERS

Function Description

Belonging Groups meet the human need to be included in an

interpersonal network. They promote contact

between people, regulate relations with others,

and increase the quality and duration of social

interaction. They provide members with a sense

inclusion and security.

Intimacy Groups, and cohesive groups in particular,

provide opportunity for warm, supportive, loving

relationships with others.

Generativity Groups do things and so help members increase

their productivity, accomplish their personal and

shared goals, and complete tasks that could not

accomplish if working alone.

Support Groups help members cope with minor and

major life crises by providing them with

emotional and tangible resources. Group

members compliment and encourage one

another, provides mutual assistance, and share

needed resources.

Influence Groups are often the arena for the exercise and

applications of social power and influence.

Groups offer individuals the means to influence

greater numbers of individuals.

Exploration Groups provide members with information, new

ideas, and new experiences. They provide instr-

ction and opportunities for learning through

communication and other social learning

processes.

Source: Forsyth, 1996.

The above table shows what the groups does for their members on individual

bases.

I shall be considering the various aspects of group working such as social

support, group norms, peer pressure, conflicts, unclear individual

accountability and as to how it affect group working.

Social Support:

When people find themselves in stressful, difficult circumstances, they often

cope by forming or joining a group. In times of trouble, such as illness,

divorce, or loss, people seek out friends and relatives (Dooley & Catalano,

1984). Individuals experiencing work-related stress, such as layoffs, time

pressures, or inadequate supervision, cope by joining with co-workers

(Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & van Ryn, 1989; Cooper, 1981).

Groups counter stress by providing members with social comparison

information (Wills, 1991). But groups also offer members social support:

personal actions and resources that help members cope with minor aspects

of everyday living, daily hassles, and more significant life crises (Coyne &

Downey, 1991; Finch et al.

According to (Forsyth, 1999) group members provide emotional support

when they compliment and encourage one another, express their friendship

for others, and listen to others' problems without offering criticism or suggestions. They offer informational support when they give directions, offer advice, and make suggestions about how to solve a particular problem. They also offer task support and tangible assistance to one another when they help one another with their work or lend each other money. Last, most groups offer their members a sense of belonging: We are a part of something when we are members of a group (Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990).

It is evident that social support in a group goes a long way in helping an individual psychologically in order to perform effectively and efficiently.

Group norms:

Norms are a fundamental element of a group's structure, for they provide direction and motivation, organize social interactions, and make other people's responses predictable and meaningful (Forsyth, 1999). Norms define the socially appropriate way to respond in the group-the normal course of action-and the types of actions that should be avoided if at all possible (Sorrels & Kelley, 1984).

(Forsyth, 1999) says that norms can be divided into two: The descriptive norm and injunctive norms, or prescriptive norms.

Descriptive norms define what most people would do, feel, or think in a particular situation while prescriptive norms, are evaluative expectations that define what people should and should not do in a given situation; those who violate such norms are evaluated negatively.

Conflicts:

Conflict is an unavoidable consequence of life in groups (Forsyth, 1999).

Conflict is everywhere. Members of 71 groups met for a semester in a college class. When asked, " Did your group experience any conflict?" they identified 424 instances of interpersonal irritation (Wall & Nolan, 1987). A group by its very nature, creates interdependence among its members, raising the possibility that members' likes and dislikes, their opinions and perspectives, their motives and their goals will clash. (See Fraser & Hipel, 1984; Levine & Thompson, 1996: Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994; Tjosvold, 1986 for reviews.)

There are various types of conflicts that occur in working in a group, some of which include:

Personal conflict, also called affective conflict (Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954), personality conflict (Wall & Nolan, 1987), or emotional conflict (Jehn, 1995), is rooted in individuals' antipathy for other group members. Personal likes and dislikes do not always translate into group conflict, but people often mention their dissatisfaction for another group member when they air their complaints about their groups (Alicke et al., 1992; Kelley, 1979; Wall & Nolan, 1987).

Procedural Conflicts occur when strategies, policies, and methods clash (Forsyth, 1999). The leader of the group may become decisions and initiate actions without consulting the group; but the group may become irritated if denied an opportunity to participate in decision making (Smoke & Zajonc, 1962).

Many groups minimize procedural ambiguities by adopting formal rules-by laws, constitutions, statements of policies, or mission and procedures statements-that specify goals, decisional processes, and responsibilities (Houle, 1989).

Substantive Conflicts

These are conflicts that are integrally related to the group's work. They do not stem from personal disagreements between individuals, but from disagreements about issues that are relevant to the group's real goals and outcomes (Forsyth, 1999).

Groups and organizations use such conflicts to make plans, increase creativity, solve problems, decide issues, and resolve conflicts of viewpoint (McGrath, 1984).

I will be considering the various theories and approaches on groups. According to Forsyth, 1999, most theories embrace assumptions from one or more of the motivational, behavioural, systems, cognitive, and biological perspectives.

Motivational Models:

Kurt Lewin's level-of-aspiration theory is, at core, a motivational model, for it explains how people set goals for themselves and their groups (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, & Sears, 1944). The theory assumes that people enter achievement situations with an ideal outcome in mind (Forsyth, 1999)

Alvin Zander (1971/1996) applied level of aspiration theory to groups by studying how individual members set goals for their groups and how they

revise their goals after each group success and failure. When group members complete a task, they expend considerable mental energy reviewing their efforts and outcomes. They gather and weigh information about their performance and determine if they met the group's standards.

Behavioral Approaches:

Many theories of group behavioural are consistent with B. F. Skinner's (1953, 1971) behaviourism. Skinner believed that psychological processes, such as motives and drives, may shape people's reactions in groups, but he also believed that such psychological processes are too difficult to index accurately.

John Thibaut and Harold Kelley's (1959) social exchange theory extended Skinner's behaviourism to groups. They agreed that individuals hedonistically strive to maximize their rewards and minimize their costs. But when individuals join groups, they no longer control their outcomes. Groups create interdependence among members, so that the actions of each group member potentially influence the outcomes and actions of every other group member.

Systems Theories:

[A system is] a set of interacting units with relationships among them. The word " set" implies that the units have some common properties. These common properties are essential if the units are to interact or have relationships. The state of each unit is constrained by, conditioned by, or dependent on the state of other units. The units are coupled. Moreover,

there is at least one measure of the sum of its units which is larger than the sum of that measure of its units. [Miller, 1978, p. 16]