Module: Group Dynamics

Summary of Concepts

This learning module addresses the portion of chapter eight, Interacting in Teams and Groups, in pages x-x. In this section, students explore group dynamics, including group roles and group norms.

Groups engage in various processes that are often called group dynamics. Group dynamics include such processes as how the group makes decisions, how the group handles its conflict, and how the group meets its leadership needs. Group roles and group norms are the driving influences of group dynamics.

Groups depend on two kinds of roles: group-building roles and task roles. Group-building roles are actions that focus on the group as people, including the relationships among members. Task roles focus on accomplishing the purposes of the group, including giving information and opinions and moving the group along on tasks by summarizing and by using various decision-making strategies.

Group norms are the rules of conduct that lead to consistent practices in a group. Some norms are explicit and clearly seen by all participants. Other norms may have evolved through the cultural practices of the group. The group norms collectively contribute to the group’s overall personality.

Learning Outcomes

Students will

- Apply both group-building roles and task roles in a group activity.
- Consider how group norms impact the functioning of teams and groups.
- Be able to articulate group norms for a specific organization.

Module Overview

Lead students in a “balloon challenge,” offering them the opportunity to engage in both group-building roles and task roles. Through several iterations of the activity, students will be able to experiment with and alternate between different roles. Facilitate small group discussion about the development of group norms, reflecting on both the balloon challenge and students’ personal experiences. Invite students to articulate group norms for a specific organization in the form of hieroglyphics (i.e., cave-type drawings).

Estimated Time
Activity One: Balloon Challenge
- Three rounds of balloon activity: 20 minutes
- Reflective discussion: 10 minutes
Activity Two: Experience with Group Norms

- Small group exploration: 5 minutes
- Reporting out and large group discussion: 10 minutes

Activity Three: Hieroglyphic Moment

- Small group work: 10 minutes
- Large group sharing of drawings: 5 minutes

Materials/Supplies

Packages of multi-colored balloons (one balloon per student plus one balloon per group)
Permanent markers (at least one per group) to write on balloons
Flipchart paper (or alternate medium) to capture ideas from large and small groups

Module Activities

Activity One: Balloon Challenge (30 minutes)

Explain to students that this activity allows them to experience and practice key components of group dynamics.

Divide students into groups of four to seven people. Give each person a different colored balloon (ensuring a variety of colors within each group). Ask them to blow up and tie their balloon. Then, ask them to write their name on the balloon with a permanent marker. (Note: Non-permanent markers may smear.) Explain that they will be responsible for not letting their own balloon touch the ground.

Then, give each group an extra balloon of another color (e.g., red) and tell them that this is the “team balloon.” Explain that it belongs to no one in particular but is the responsibility of the entire team. Tell them that they must keep the balloons afloat for two minutes and that the team will be awarded points for each balloon they keep afloat. Indicate that different color balloons are worth different points. For example:

- Yellow = 1 point
- Green = 3 points
- Blue = 5 points
- Pink = 7 points
- Red (the team balloon) = 15 points

Tell them to begin. After a period of time, increase the difficulty by not allowing them to use their hands or by specifying the body part that they must use (knees, feet, etc.). After two minutes call time and total the group scores based on which balloons they kept afloat.

Ask each group to develop a strategy for improving their performance. (If any groups achieved all of the points possible, encourage them to propose criteria for bonus points.) After about two minutes of group discussion on appropriate strategies, begin the two-minute balloon challenge again.
Following the second round of the balloon challenge, ask the groups to share among their members how they feel about their performance with the activity. Encourage them to develop a strategy for ensuring all members of the group remain included and enjoy the activity. After about two minutes of group discussion on appropriate strategies, begin the two-minute balloon challenge again.

Debriefing Questions

- How did this activity reveal group dynamics?
  - How did your group handle the “team balloon”?
  - Did it matter that each of you had your name on a particular balloon? Explain.

- Following the first round of the balloon challenge, when you had the opportunity to discuss a strategy, what group roles were highlighted in the discussion?
  - Was the discussion more about group-building (i.e., maintaining positive relationships) or task roles?
  - What (if any) dysfunctional roles hampered the group’s progress?

- How did the discussion and strategy change between rounds two and three?
  - What group-building strategies did you employ?
  - Did you default to a particular role set (i.e., preferred set of practices)?

- How do different combinations of group roles contribute to group norms?
  - Was there a different culture or personality among certain groups? Why?
  - What group norms would be best suited for success with this activity?

Activity Variation

After the second round of the balloon challenge, partner high performing groups with low performing groups, encouraging the high performers to coach and encourage the low performers.

Optional
Add questions to the debriefing to highlight the stages of group development as well as the use of SMART goals.

Activity Two: Experience with Group Norms (15 minutes)

In pairs or small groups, have students identify at least one organization with which they are familiar. Ask them to consider the following:

- How would you describe the personality of the organization?
  - Is it more social or task-oriented?
  - Are there multiple levels and layers of leadership, or is it a more open structure?

- How does the organization articulate rules of conduct?
  - Does it have bylaws or published meeting procedures?
  - Is there an orientation for new members?

- For group norms that are not clearly articulated, how do members know about them?
  - How are guests or new members introduced to the organization?
What cues for accepted behavior are visible at organizational meetings?

Ask each group to share their experiences with the larger group. Compare and contrast different organizations. Engage the group in a discussion about the issues raised. As students share, connect their statements back to the readings. Ask them to consider how group norms influence group roles (i.e., group-building roles and task roles). Ask them to consider how the opposite is also true.

**Activity Three: Hieroglyphic Moment (15 minutes)**

Ask students to return to their small groups and articulate the chosen organization’s norms in the form of hieroglyphics (i.e., cave-type drawings). Encourage them to think of these hieroglyphics like road signs, directing new members how to proceed and what to watch for. To the degree possible, encourage competition between groups, offering extra recognition to the group with the most instructive or creative hieroglyphics. After each group has had sufficient time to prepare their hieroglyphics, invite them to share their drawings with the larger group.

**Facilitator Notes**


If latex balloons are used, students with latex allergies will not be able to fully participate in the balloon challenge. However, having the group remain responsible for that individual’s balloon can help surface discussions about diversity and what to do about individual limitations.

The balloon challenge will likely surface many issues related to groups and teams. The discussion will likely include stages of group development as well as goal setting. Be prepared for a broader discussion than the focus readings.

When students share examples from their own experience, be sure to balance stories of group dysfunction with positive stories of group success.

**Author Bio**

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