AREA II OVERVIEW  
The Group System

Lessons 11. Groups as Open Systems

12. Group Development

13. Socialization

14. Cohesion

15. Decision-Making in Groups

16. Intergroup Conflict

AREA OVERVIEW

As we have seen in this course and experienced throughout our lives, the process of influencing human behavior is difficult and complex. This leadership challenge is further complicated when leading groups of individuals. These groups often develop and exhibit behaviors that are not evident in solitary individuals. For example, in a highly cohesive unit, the group as a whole may excel at accomplishing what single individuals, by themselves, could not. However, a highly cohesive group may develop methods of operation and goals that are incongruent with the organization, creating a leadership challenge more critical and difficult to resolve than any individual motivation issue discussed to this point. Nevertheless, in each of these cases, leaders must understand and manage group processes to build functional, effective work groups that satisfy individual, group, and organizational expectations.

Effective leaders must be capable of pulling together individuals of diverse backgrounds, personalities, abilities, training, and experience molding them into cohesive, high performing teams. The challenge is to bring all of the unique contributions of individual group members together in such a way that the whole will equal more than simply the sum of the parts.

“Four brave men who do not know each other will not dare to attack a lion. Four less brave men, but knowing each other well, sure of their reliability and, consequently, of mutual aid, will attack resolutely.”

—Ardant DuPicq

Recall, if you will, the Model of Organizational Leadership. Note the position of both functional (sometimes referred to as formal) and extra-organizational groups in the structure of the organization (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. The Model of Organizational Leadership**



Because groups are a critical building block of organizations, their efficiency is directly related to an organization’s success. Consequently, the leader’s ability to form, develop, and lead functional and effective groups is absolutely essential if the organization’s mission is to be accomplished. Knowledge of group dynamics, then, is paramount for both effective leaders and organizations. In Area II, we will concentrate on these processes, further honing your abilities as a leader.

**Lesson 11: Groups As Open Systems**

**Introduction:**

This lesson covers:

1. Groups as Open Systems

2. Structural Dimensions of a Group

3. Student Journal Entry

**Assignment:**

1. **Read** **the Course Guide**, pages 1 - 8.

2. When you solve a case study or act as a leader in your organization:

I. ***Identify*** the Areas of Interest.

II. ***Analyze***the situation using Groups as an Open System.

A. ***Identify*** the Group Structural Dimensions evident in the situation.

B. ***Describe*** the interdependence among the components of the Groups as Open Systems Model (GOSM) (Figure 19) and the Group Structural Dimensions that are evident in the situation.

III. ***Explain*** an Area of Interest in terms of how the Group Structural Dimensions evident in the situation affect individual performance, satisfaction, and motivation; group performance; and organizational performance—the outcomes of the GOSM.

***Please complete a student journal entry on "Groups as Open Systems."***

Think about your current work group, which could be any formally established group in your police department with an organizationally appointed leader and at least several group members, of which you are or have been a member. Use this group to identify and describe each of the five Group Structural Dimensions displayed in your group. Explain how these dimensions have influenced individual performance, satisfaction, and motivation; group performance; and organizational performance. Finally, discuss the leadership significance of these Group Structural Dimensions for your workgroup.

**GROUPS AS OPEN SYSTEMS**

After learning the basics of leading individuals in Area I, we may feel prepared to lead a group. However, leading a group is different from leading individuals. Groups can be beneficial when we benefit from their teamwork, synergy, and other positive group dynamics. At other times, leading a group may produce less impressive results than expected despite the available individual talent.

To provide a framework for studying groups, we will use the Open Systems Model concept from Area I. In Lesson 3, we studied the Individual as a Psychological System, focusing on how individuals process inputs from the environment and produce outputs. In this area, we will use a similar framework to study how groups, as systems, take inputs and produce outputs.

The Groups as Open Systems Model (GOSM), shown in Figure 19, is based on extensive research in the field of group dynamics and encompasses the key variables that leaders need to consider. Figure 19 outlines seven sets of critical variables for analyzing groups. There are two main types of inputs to the group: personal or individual characteristics and situational characteristics. The group's throughput processes encompass group structural dimensions and group process variables. The group's outputs are categorized into effects on individuals, effects on the group itself, and effects on the organization. These variables will now be examined in detail.

Personal or individual characteristics include all the individual strengths and weaknesses (knowledge, skills, abilities, biases, values, and beliefs) that people bring to the group. This can be considered as the talent pool that the group has to work with, similar to raw materials. As with any transformation process, the quality of the raw materials significantly influences the final product. It's generally easier to produce a high-quality group output when you start with high-quality people. The quality and diversity of the inputs also have a major impact on the tasks of group leaders. For example, the challenges faced by a SWAT team leader responsible for a team of specialized officers differ from those of an academy training officer with a new crew of police trainees.

The context in which a group operates greatly influences its dynamics. Factors such as the physical environment and the group size can have a significant impact on group behavior. For instance, the effectiveness of a group can vary based on the nature of the task. A group that excels in patrolling a district at night may not perform well when managing a large crowd at a political demonstration.

Moving forward, let us focus on group structural dimensions. Although we will delve deeper into this topic in our next reading, it is essential to understand the five fundamental characteristics of any group. While a single dimension may not determine the success or failure of a group, the interplay among these dimensions is crucial. For example, high cohesion, which represents the bond within a group, can have positive or negative effects on group performance. The outcome depends on the interaction between cohesion and norms, which are the informal rules and objectives that guide a group. When high cohesion is coupled with low-performance norms, it can lead to issues for the leader. Conversely, high cohesion alongside high-performance norms results in high-performing groups. Therefore, structural dimensions influence group performance by influencing the intermediary variable, the group process.

The interactions and communication patterns within a group have a significant impact on its success. Informal leaders may emerge, cliques may form, and certain individuals may become more influential than others may. These group processes can either have a positive or negative effect on the group's ability to achieve its goals.

As groups evolve, the issues that are important to them can change over time. Groups typically go through predictable stages of development, and understanding the stage a group is in can help its leaders guide it toward more mature stages.

Group structure and processes are closely connected, and changes in one can greatly affect the other. For instance, dysfunctional competition between sub-groups in a department can hinder the overall mission. By understanding and altering group structural dimensions, leaders can ensure that group processes align with the organization's goals.

The final focus is on the outputs we can expect from groups. As illustrated in Figure 19, there are three categories of outputs. We are concerned with the effect the group has on individual members, the group itself, and the organization's mission because leaders attempt to bridge the gap between individual needs and the needs of the organization. Members join groups often voluntarily because membership fulfills some individual need or desire. These members do not hesitate to quit a club or informal group that becomes a burden or is dissatisfying. Likewise, police officers can quit their jobs. However, worst of all, some will quit mentally or psychologically if the group no longer meets their needs, potentially endangering the lives of fellow officers. Therefore, leaders must be concerned with the group's impact on member satisfaction. In addition to satisfaction, groups can either enhance or attenuate individual member's knowledge, skills, and abilities. Many groups form primarily for these reasons. Computer groups, chess clubs, and study groups are all examples of these types of groups. On the other hand, you have probably belonged to at least one group where you just could not seem to live up to your potential or where you were stifled, bored, or frustrated. Therefore, good leaders strive to meet the needs of their followers so that they, in turn, can live up to their potential.

On the other side of the leadership gap is the organization's mission. Groups in police departments are not usually formed for fun and fellowship; they are organized, equipped, and trained to accomplish a mission. Therefore, the process of effective leadership is all about influencing the group to accomplish its mission to the highest possible standards of performance.

Lastly, changes to the group affect a group's structure and processes. New norms form over time. Status in the organization may shift as members spend more time together. Roles shift and adjust (perhaps in response to personnel turbulence). All of these outputs are evaluated and feedback is given to the group. The parent organization might reward high rates of mission success. These rewards, in and of themselves, are perceived as a change in situational characteristics. Suppose one output from the group is the production of better, smarter, more technically competent officers. In that case, the individual inputs may have shifted dramatically when considering the group over some time. This feedback process is what makes groups dynamic and is fundamental to their development over time.

**Figure 19. The Groups as Open Systems Model (GOSM)**



**Structural Dimensions of a Group**

We have defined a group as an interactional subsystem of the larger organizational structure. Now, let us explore the individual components of the subsystem – the structural dimensions. In a group context, structural dimensions can be likened to a machine. For a machine to operate efficiently, all of its components must function effectively. The same principle applies to a group; all of its structural dimensions must be in good working order. Individual roles, individual status, group norms, group composition, and cohesion among individuals are all dimensions that leaders must comprehend to influence the group process. We will analyze each dimension separately and then explore their combined influence on the group's performance.

**Individual Roles**

In a well-functioning group, each member typically has an agreed-upon position with specific responsibilities. In the Model of Organizational Leadership, the leader holds a central role and is responsible for ensuring that the group contributes to the larger organization's goals. To achieve this, the leader usually assigns specific tasks to each group member. For example, one member may be responsible for supplies, including maintaining inventory, distributing items, keeping usage records, and reordering items. These tasks define the individual's role in the group. A role is defined as a "pattern of behavior expected of a person when interacting with others” (Duncan, 1978).

When given a task in a group, it may seem straightforward at first. However, more often than not, there are underlying expectations and perceptions tied to the task. The individual's perception of their responsibilities may differ from the leader's perception, resulting in conflicting expectations and tensions. This can lead to role ambiguity, where the group member is unsure how to carry out their task. Ambiguity can also exist between a person's expectations of other group members' behavior and their expectations of their behavior.

On the other hand, it is essential for an efficient work group that there is role clarity among members. When members are uncertain about their roles, it can lead to increased job stress, tension, and decreased job satisfaction (Duncan, 1978).

Furthermore, there may be instances when a group member receives conflicting directions from multiple sources, creating role conflict and role ambiguity. This can negatively affect individual behavior, leading to withdrawal from the group, emotional stress, and decreased morale and satisfaction (Duncan, 1978).

For a group to function optimally, the leader needs to clearly communicate their expectations to all members, while also being aware of any potential role conflicts. It is not unusual to hear people say that a certain person or group really "has it together." This means that the group members, leader, and peers all share the same understanding of their tasks.

**Individual Status**

In a group setting, some members may have more rights and privileges than others may. This might include having a private office with a window instead of a cubicle, a larger desk, or access to special facilities not available to everyone. These differences in rights and privileges reflect the social hierarchy within the group, which is referred to as status. Status is determined through group interactions and informal guidelines based on the perceived contribution of individuals to the group's goals, as well as seniority. One important point to note about status is that it requires adherence to the group's expectations. A member's rank and privileges are not as important as meeting the group's expectations for their role.

In any organization, there are several formalized, widely recognized indicators of status (Sayles & Strauss, 1966). The job title is an important one. The titles chief executive officer, commander, and director all indicate high-status positions, while assistant or deputy indicate lower status. There are also subtler indicators, such as the prestige associated with certain job titles. For example, in our society, professors have more status than librarians do, and electricians have more status than bus drivers do.

Higher pay usually indicates higher status, as does the way one is paid. In industry, salaried workers are generally thought to have more status than those who receive an hourly wage. The highest-status individuals, however, measure income by yearly statistics.

Special privileges are another indication of status. For example, there is more prestige associated with eating in the faculty lounge than in the student cafeteria. Job factors such as the cleanliness of the work area, freedom from supervision, advanced levels of training and skill, and good opportunities for promotion all suggest higher status. Additionally, symbols like the physician's white coat, a police officer's rank, or the uniform of elite military forces, such as green berets, represent status positions as well. Since status can often be based on perception, the above examples are certainly not all-inclusive. Each group has its list, although interestingly, we do find many similarities between groups in our society.

Leaders have a unique opportunity to create and bestow status within a group. However, they must be sensitive to the status indicators already at work.

Status provides ego rewards and social satisfaction. It also offers security and predictability by helping people understand where they, and others, stand. Additionally, it makes interactions between people easier (Sayles & Strauss, 1966). If the status system is not functioning properly, the leader can expect morale issues to arise. Therefore, status indicators must remain clear and consistent. As discussed concerning individual motivation through reward and punishment, discrimination of status is expected within a group. If a leader's actions disrupt the established system of reward and recognition, this could lead to status incongruence, causing anxiety for group members.

Another important point for leaders is that status systems tend to change over time. When a status symbol loses its significance, it may lead to insecure feelings among group members whose status was tied to the modified symbol. For example, opening a previously restricted parking area can disrupt executives who previously considered those spaces their own. Leaders should also be aware that if status is given too much emphasis, it could widen the gap between high- and low-status group members, hindering communication among members.

**Group Norms**

Which behaviors are considered acceptable and which are unacceptable to the group? How much effort should I put into my work compared with my peers? Does the group start working promptly or does it spend some time chatting and joking first? These are some questions a group member may have, and yet these questions will not be formally addressed. That is because they are "rules of conduct established by the members of the group to maintain behavioral consistency” (Shaw, 1976). These rules of conduct, or norms, are the unofficial laws of the group. Without established norms, the group will likely be in chaos.

Essentially, norms serve two purposes. They guide the behavior of the group, and they guide each member's behavior. Norms assist group members in anticipating each other's behavior and thereby reduce the amount of ambiguity experienced by members (Shaw, 1976). Norms are not legislated; they emerge as events occur and as the group develops.

To further understand how norms develop and influence behavior in groups, four factors have been identified: (Shaw, 1976)

1. A group does not create norms about every conceivable situation—only about things that are significant to the group. For example, the group may not care what someone eats for lunch as long as the group eats lunch together.

2. Norms may apply to every member or only to certain members—that is, they may be role-specific. To continue the example used above, leaders are not expected to eat with the group, yet members are.

3. Norms vary in importance among group members. Part of the group may feel strongly about lunch, while others do not.

4. Norms vary in the amount of permissible deviation from expected behavior. When a person goes beyond a permissible range, a sanction is usually applied. A group member may miss an occasional meal, but when he or she does so constantly, that person risks becoming the butt of practical jokes or malicious gossip.

The informal rules of behavior within a group, known as norms, can be beneficial to the group but may also create challenges for the leader. For instance, if the group norm encourages reduced output to have a more relaxed work pace; it may hinder the group from performing optimally.

Leaders should be mindful of these informal rules and work on reinforcing those that align with the organization's goals while discouraging those that contradict them. Since these norms are, a part of the group dynamic, leaders should proceed cautiously when seeking to change them.

**Group Composition**

The composition of groups generally falls into two categories: homogenous, where individuals have similar abilities, skills, resources, and social backgrounds, and heterogeneous, where group members possess completely different characteristics. It can be difficult to determine which type of group is more effective.

In a homogenous group, members tend to share similar thoughts and values, leading to effective communication and minimal conflict (Davis, 1969). However, this uniformity can stifle productivity by promoting excessive conformity.

On the other hand, heterogeneous groups benefit from diverse skill sets and problem-solving approaches. Nonetheless, they are prone to conflicts and communication challenges. Despite this, heterogeneous groups typically generate more innovative results.

Ultimately, group performance is influenced by group type and the nature of the task. When facing simple and routine tasks, homogenous groups tend to perform better. Conversely, heterogeneous groups are generally more effective for complex tasks requiring diverse problem-solving strategies (Steiner, 1969).

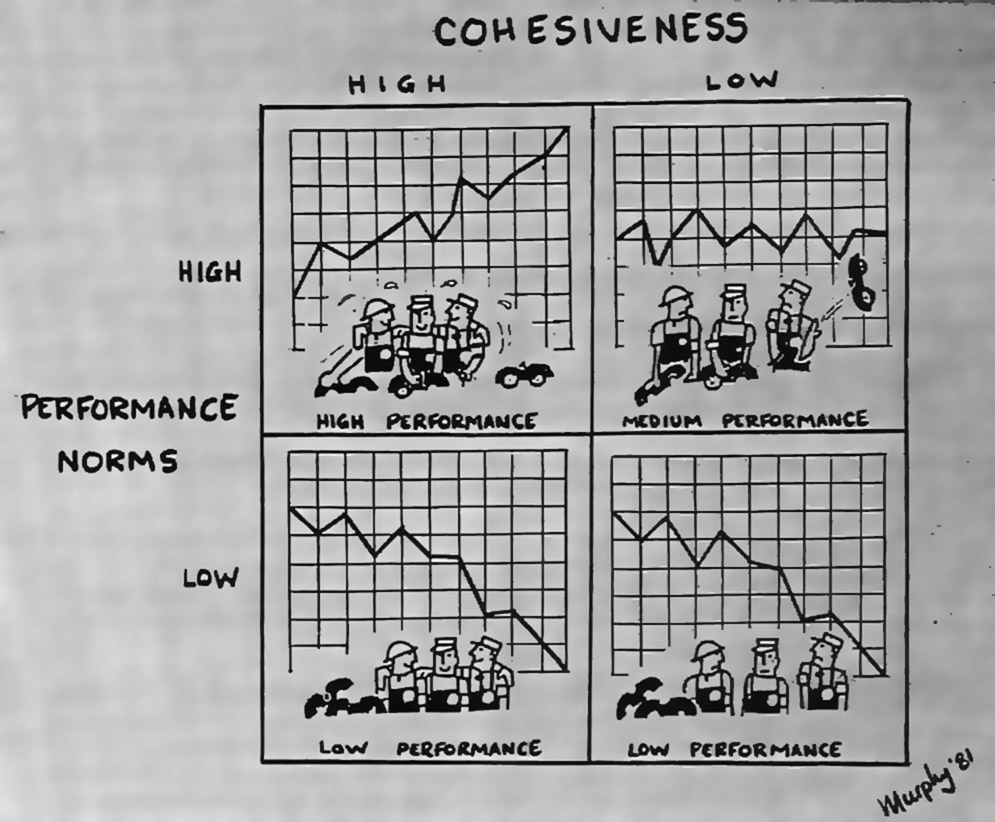
When considering group dynamics, the size of the group is an important factor to consider. Research indicates that smaller groups tend to perceive less need for a leader's guidance, as well as a lower group ability and fewer expressed ideas. Conversely, larger groups demonstrate a wider range of skills and knowledge, but a decrease in individual participation time and group member satisfaction. The specific nature of the task is crucial in determining the ideal group size, as it affects group effectiveness differently (McGrath, J.E. & Altman, I, 1966), (Shaw, 1966).

**Group Cohesion**

The effectiveness of a group depends not only on the individual skills and abilities of its members but also on the group's ability to work together as a cohesive unit. Cohesiveness, defined as the ability of a group to think and act as one in pursuit of common goals, is crucial to the group's success (Walker, C.R.; Guest, R.H., Turner, A.N., Hampton, David R., Summer, Charles E. & Webber, Ross A., 1968). D. Cartwright, an organizational psychologist, highlights that highly cohesive groups are more motivated to contribute to the group's welfare, advance its objectives, and participate in its activities (Cartwright, D., 1968; Cartwright, Dorwin & Zander, Alvin, 1968).

Factors that increase group cohesiveness include agreement on group goals, frequent interaction among group members, personal attractiveness to one another, intergroup competition, and favorable evaluation of group performance. Conversely, factors that decrease group cohesiveness include disagreement on goals, group size, unpleasant experiences with the group, intragroup competition, and domination by one or more members (Ivancevich, Szlagyi and Wallace, no publication date).

**Figure 20. The Interaction of Group Norms and Cohesion**



What is the relationship between group cohesiveness and performance? If a group is highly cohesive and has norms prioritizing high performance, we can expect the group to perform well. On the other hand, if a highly cohesive group has norms that favor low performance, we can anticipate a decrease in performance. For groups with low cohesion, group norms have less impact on performance compared to groups with high cohesion. This phenomenon is depicted in the Murphy cartoon in Figure 20.

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Name:

**Complete a Student Journal entry** for Groups as Open Systems.

Think of your current workgroup. This can be any formal established group in your police department with an organizationally appointed leader and at least several group members of which you are or have been, a member. Using this group, identify and describe each of the five Group Structural Dimensions as exhibited in your group**.** How have (or do) each of these dimensions influence individual performance, satisfaction, and motivation; group performance; and organizational performance? What is the leadership significance of these Group Structural Dimensions for your work group?