

Subject- Psychology (H), B.A. Part-I, Paper-II
(Social Psychology), Ch- Groups
Topic- Group Norms:

A new vice president came into an organisation. At the end of her first weekly meeting with her staff members, she tossed a nerf ball to one of them and asked the person to say how she ^{was} feeling. When that person to say finished, the vice president asked her to toss the ball to someone else, and so on, until everyone had expressed himself or herself. This process soon became a regular feature of the group's meetings.

In our earlier section on group life cycles, you learned about Bruce Tuckman's model of Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. Along with roles, status, and trust, which we'll encounter in the next chapter, norms are usually generated and adapted after a group's "Forming" and "Storming" stages.

As a group moves from "Forming" toward "Performing", then, norms help guide its members along the way. Whether we see them or not, norms are powerful predictors of a group behaviour.
What Norms Are?

Group norms are rules or guidelines that reflect expectations of how group members should act and interact. They define what behaviour are acceptable or not; good or not; right or not; or appropriate or not; (O' Hair & Wieman, p. 19). O' Hair, D. & Wiemann, M.O. (2004). The essential guide to group communication. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Norms may relate to how people look, behave, or communicate with each other. Passing a new Nerf ball around a circle of workers is perhaps a peculiar way to start a meeting, and it probably doesn't contribute directly to achieving substantive goals, but it did represent a norm in the vice president's group we described which, by the way, was a real group and not a product of imagination!

Some norms relate to how a group as a whole will act - e.g., when and how often it will meet, for instance. Others have to do with the behaviour of individual group members and the roles those members play within the group.

By defining what social behaviour lies within acceptable

Boundaries, norms can help a group function smoothly and face conflict without falling apart (Hayes, P.31) Hayes, N (2004). - Managing teams: A Strategy for Success. London: Thomson. Thus, they can constitute a potent force to promote positive interaction among group members.

Origin of Norms:

For a new group, norms may arise organically as members settle into their relationships and start to function together. Decisions need to be made and time needs to be taken for diverse activities such as ~~identify~~ identifying goals, determining tasks, and allocating human and tangible resources. Who will take the lead on these areas of the group's behaviour has to be determined.

Further questions need to be answered as the group gets off the ground. Here are some examples:

- * what topics are and are not appropriate for the group to discuss.
- * How and to what degree will members respect and attend to

each other's statements and viewpoints?

* How and when, if ever, will the group behave casually?

* What mechanisms will the group use to solve problems?

Any group eventually needs to deal with these questions, and the answers it reaches will become embodied as norms.

Implicit Norms

Whether a group is new or not, its norms aren't always expressed or discussed. People may simply assume that certain norms exist and accept them "by unspoken consent"

(Galanes & Adams, p. 162), Galanes, G. & Adams, K. (2013). Effective group discussion: Theory and Practice. New York: McGraw-Hill. in which case they are implicit norms.

Consider "same seat syndrome," for example. How often have you found that people in a college classroom seem to gravitate every day to

exactly the same chairs they have always sat in? Nobody says "Hey, I have decided that this will be my chair forever" or "I see that that is your territory, so I shall never sit there," do they?

Often norms are difficult for group members to express in words. What topics are okay or not okay to talk about during informal "chit-chat" may be a matter of instilled intuition rather than something that people can readily describe. Nevertheless, implicit norms may be extremely powerful, and even large groups are apt to have at least some implicit norms.

The cultural background each member brings to a group may lie beneath conscious awareness, yet it may exert a powerful influence on both that person's and the group's behaviour and expectations. Just as a fish is unaware that it lives in water, a person may easily go through life and participate in group interactions without perceiving that he or she is the product of a culture.

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