

NATURE AND DYNAMICS OF WORK GROUPS

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ABSTRACT: Organizational management has experienced an accelerated evolution in recent years due to changes on the labor market and socio-economic structures. This has resulted in a series of changes at the microeconomic level imposed by the need to adapt to new conditions in order to obtain maximum performance and impact. Human resource management strategies play a crucial role in the success of organizations through practical benefits they bring to them, knowing that people and the organization way create value. In this regard, work groups represent a solution implemented more and more often to help meet immediate and strategic objectives. Organizations generally consist of groups of people who work together for the achievement of common goals. Groups are an elemental force for organizational action. Group dynamics refers to processes, performances and alterations which happen inside the group. The way that the group works together is based on the group process that refers to how the members of an organization collaborate and get their targets achieved.

Key words: group, group dynamics, communication, interaction, norms, values, membership

JEL Codes: M5

Introduction

From a psycho-sociological point of view, the group may be defined as a set of individuals which have integrative functional, communicative, affective and normative links. Group members have common goals, common activities, they communicate and establish relationships with some development in time. By nature, human society is an organized group, consisting of large groups (nations, ethnic groups, social classes) that include various types of medium and small groups (collective, classes of students, groups of friends, families, couples).

Groups are formed from people that interact with each other and can relate, very likely whereas they have common objectives and have a similar oneness. This shared oneness is what differentiates a group from other groups and serves to the group dynamics. Individuals adjoin at the groups for many various considerations. Some considerations might be that they feel the group shares their goals, they have a certain purpose and can get various rewards from being in that group, etc. The individual's function in a group is very important to the group dynamics.

Each individual belongs to several such groups on the course of his life. Although belonging to the same social higher group (citizens of a city, of a country) persons that happen to be in a public place - the stadium, train compartment, etc. can communicate, can cooperate in joint action, can establish relationships of sympathy / antipathy, without constituting, as defined above, a group because such a set of persons are missing one or more of the defining characteristics of the group: purpose, activity, values, common rules during the time of the relationship. Such *incidental agglomeration* or *spontaneous grouping*, regardless of its size, can be considered in psycho-sociological terms as a crowd, a mob, but not a group (Radu, 2007).

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Literature review

Operating in the segment of conceptual boundaries, we can distinguish a list of definitions of the group. Thus, for Shaw, the group represents "two or more people who interact with each other in such a way that each influences and is influenced by others" (Pânișoară, 2008); the author provides a more detailed overview of the group, some elements of definition: thus the group involves interaction, structure (rules, relationships, roles between members), common goals, the need for group and dynamic interdependence.

Myers affirms that the group is "two or more persons, which for more than a few minutes, interact influencing each other and perceiving each other as *we*" (Myers, 1990).

From the perspective of the communication theories the group is made up of a "number of people who communicate with each other quite often for a period of time and which are sufficiently limited so that everyone can communicate with all other directly, not through others" (Homans, 2009).

Thus Homans has identified several elements that inter-relate dynamically and in fact, constitutes the core of group life: rules, activities, communication and interaction.

Inside the group there is a distinction between the inner and outer world, and each group member must realize the position in the group to relate to other members of the group. On the other hand, relations with the outside is made at particular levels, communication being a fundamental way to the very existence of the group, whereas at the basis of social groups is the social interaction and communication (Marinescu, 2003).

Group roles are largely determined by a combination of individual's personality and his or her experience with group settings. A person who is shy is more likely to not stand out in a group. An impatient person will push the discussion ahead, but instead a person who is not self-conscious will offer more opinions. Every group is particular in different ways. The groups are systems that build, establish, and support the interactions between the members. Group members get into discussions, they talk about their issues and after that they make decisions and take action.

Research methodology

This article represents a basic scientific research that performs a theoretical construction of the analyzed subject: the nature and dynamics of work groups. In the empirical investigation process there were analyzed and interpreted data and information already available, considered means of general documentation, which were selected from a variety of bibliographic sources and are subject to a process of constant comparison and conceptual framing in order to justify the importance of the realized study. The purpose of this work was to find explanatory theories which describe certain conceptual properties of work groups and allow the deduction of the baseline with the help of the social effects that we wanted to explain.

The work group and its characteristics

Communication within groups obeys different but complementary principles of interpersonal communication: interaction logic and status is reinforced by the effects of personality in the group dynamics, its structure, its objectives that establishes collective identity, the balance of power (Ștefănescu, 2009).

Characteristics of interpersonal communication in groups are determined by (Ștefănescu, 2009):

- a. group structure (formal or informal, primary or secondary etc.).
- b. structure of relations between members of the group (solidarity versus conflict);
- c. structure of statuses and roles;
- d. network activities within the group and
- e. network of links between the group and its exterior.

When talking about defining group Steers identifies several specific areas such as: perceptual, structural, motivational and interpersonal.

To achieve different objectives as a result of the interaction of group members there are born rules of conduct, opinions and collective attitudes.

In the actions to solve difficult problems in group life, there are born states of optimism, unity in action, excitement, mutual trust, interaction of group members. There can be failure, unresolved unwanted situations, causing distrust, dissatisfaction, split of the group, collective anger. The group's morale can be stimulated or inhibited by the occurrence of unusual events. This enables the collective memory, arousing interest or disinterest and stimulates collective action (Mureşan, 2005).

People establish connections that reveal their abilities, qualities, advantages and disadvantages and make them adapt and improve by the influence of others. Also, through social learning, they can internalize the patterns and norms of interpersonal behavior, learn to behave with each other. Reporting to another, relationship with another is cleared by the two types of effects: improved knowledge and self-knowledge, and better organization of their lives and activities (Abric, 2002).

Working within a group there are a number of elements that customize it:

- one or more common goals to be achieved by the participation of all;
- rules of behavior and conduct accepted and respected by every member of the group;
- a statute that includes the rights and obligations of members;
- a role (the manner in which the person shall serve under the statute);
- certain socio-emotional relationships between group members that may promote or hinder the targets achievements.

In this sense within a work group may occur both advantages and disadvantages, as follows:

Table no. 1

Advantages and disadvantages of conducting business within a working group

The development of activity in the working group:	
Advantages	Disadvantages
greater potential for information	social pressures
higher experience	emergence of a dominant figure
decisions can be scientifically proved	time constraints
	frequent disagreements

Source: adapted from Tran and Stănciugelu, 2003

To function, a group must have a common task to solve, it must "produce" a finished product. Personal needs of group members require solutions. Needs cannot be met but only through interrelations among group members.

The three dimensions of group behavior - common task, the individual as a system and interpersonal relationships between members - creates specific situations, from one group to another.

Hemphill's research revealed fourteen characteristics of the nature of the group (Hemphill, 1950):

- **Size** - Defines only the number of group members;
- **Cohesion** –Defines the degree to which members of a group function as a unit;
- **Stratification** – Is the level at which a group rank the members to their statuses;
- **Homogeneous** - the degree to which group members are similar in terms of age, gender, training and so on (the extent to which members have similar characteristics);

- **Flexibility** - the degree to which the group establishes rules, regulations, procedures, shows how the group activities are marked by information and information procedures in a rigid manner;
- **Hedonic tone** - the degree to which members participate in group activities is supported for these general feelings of pleasant and pleasure;
- **Stability** – the frequency with which the group suffers big changes and reorganization;
- **Permeability** - defines the group access level to people outside the membership of the group;
- **Polarization** – the degree to which the group focuses its efforts towards one final goal;
- **Power** - characterizes the degree to which the group is important for its members;
- **Autonomy** – indicates the level at which the group operates independently of other groups;
- **Privacy** – is the degree in which group members are familiar with the personal details of their fellow members;
- **Participation** - shows the extent to which group members invest time and effort in group activities;
- **Control** - the degree to which group behavior restricts the freedom of its members.

In certain groups there are no formally elected leaders. Also, groups can be seen as informal gatherings of people. Groups don't necessarily have a goal or an objective, they can be formed for social reasons.

If a group works well together, we can consider that it is multi-factorial. But this depends on the group members, the organizational environment and the group objectives. The cohesion of the group depends on whether individuals consider that they have a common identity and are able to develop the work in order to touch their established objectives. The group cohesion represents one of the most important factors which can be explained by group behavior and how the group members interacting. The elements that lead to cohesion are the degree of members' attraction to the group, the rules of the group and the informal influence as well as the external environment.

Types of work groups

Groups can be classified into different types, according to different criteria.

By *the nature of relations of the members* groups can be divided into: **primary groups** or contact groups and **secondary groups**.

In the primary group or contact inter-relationships are direct and can be included directly and in full by the individual. Being in contact and knowing each other directly, the components of each group may establish personal relationships. American sociologist H. Cooley, which operated the primary-secondary distinction in group problem states that primary groups are "cradle of human nature" (Cooley, 1930). He also claims that in the formation of human personality the family group is crucial, but later other groups are crucial for the safety and comfort of our physic and emotions. In the primary groups there are deeply shared goals and interests, there is a common value orientation, as there are mainly medium contentment and fulfillment and largely emotional, spiritual involvement.

Mucchielli divides the **primary groups** into four categories (Mucchielli, 2002):

1. *natural primary groups* (family, small villages, neighborhoods, the group of friends)
2. *artificial primary or occasional groups* (group in vacation, lap group, training group)
3. *sustainable primary group* (school class, club)
4. *primary momentary groups* (groups of discussion, boards).

In secondary groups, not all members are known personally. Communication takes place through intermediaries rather, interpersonal relations and intimacy is low and the other is global consciousness. Secondary groups are less a function of socialization and internalization of norms and values. Although there is a common interest, personal goals are more basic. By the secondary

groups the members can meet specific needs, pragmatic ones, so they can be called "instrumental" groups (Baron et. al, 2009). For example, coworkers or a work unit is the primary group and secondary group is the organization or company. Of course, the primary group and the secondary group are not opposed. Individuals may belong to both groups simultaneously. There are even groups with intermediate position, in which the relations "face to face" work and even of full involvement of personality, but most time they are temporary and do not involve fundamental purposes and values. They give individuals identity. Membership groups and reference groups distinguish between those who are inside a group and others outside it, between "us" and "them" (Radu et. al, 1994):

- **Group of membership** is the primary group to which an individual belongs (family, sports team, school choir, group of hikers). Here, the individual participates in collective life and is gradually entering the group norms and values of the system anchored and recognized by all members. Group membership is not a purely administrative fact, but requires assimilation of its standards of conduct and self-image, condensed into privileged and valued qualities that the group assigns;

- **The reference group** is the group to which the individual is aspiring. It fulfills a comparative and normative function, assimilating and transforming individual group values by their conduct. In social psychology, the meaning of the reference group was expanded to include on the one hand macro-social categories (classes, professions), and on the other hand, people like referential models.

Within any organization there are one or more working groups that coexist and manifest in different fields and at different hierarchical levels. They are distinguished by a series of qualitative character (Tran and Stănciugelu, 2003) which are highlighted in Table 2.

Table no. 2

Types and characteristics of work groups within an organization

No.	Type of work groups	Features
1	Formal groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – is based on official documents and rules; – belong to a formal structure; – are official and binding; – change with organizational restructuring; – they are non-profit; – are managed by a formal chief invested with hierarchical authority.
2	Informal groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – it is spontaneous based on common interests and concerns; – are governed by their own regulations; – remain the same even after changing formal structure; – aimed at supporting self-interest; – are led by an elected leader on competency based.
3	Task groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – temporary work groups that are formed for advice in a particular area; – consist of specialists vary depending on the problem to be solved; – bears the name of commission "ad-hoc".
4	Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – is a temporary or permanent work group that must solve certain problems; – teams were created for different purposes (entrepreneurial teams, autonomous teams and so on).

Source: adapted from Tran and Stănciugelu, 2003.

• **Formal and informal group** involves granted legal status. In the group, regardless of its size, there are issues and official relations, formal relations, regulated by laws, decisions, ie. official documents. There are then informal aspects and relations, which are not covered by official documents, but arise spontaneously, through processes of interaction. The formal structure is a hierarchical and functional organization of the group, reflected in the chart. The formal structure is relative to the goals of the group. The informal structure of the group is based primarily on affective relationships, and represents the distribution of sympathy and antipathy in group ways that manifest influence, the poles of attraction and conflict beyond formal structure. Informal structure is mainly due to defense mechanisms. There such the work group shall adopt informal group production, which oscillates around officially prescribed norms. The individual protect each other mutually and "understand" each other. This protective mechanism is for the control and punitive regulations and stressful or strenuous activity. It is noteworthy, however, that, in addition to every group or organization exists and operates a "formality" and "the informal" meets' society itself, such as friendship groups or gangs.

Spontaneous informal groups are parallel to the formal setting and it responds emotional necessities, reputational power of the members. It is inevitable that in any organization groups and networks of influence and interests show up, pressure groups, trade unions or simply groups who spend their free time together (Radu, 2007).

Coalition of individuals in the same job and their group structure can be enhanced by *external threats*.

In his book *Knowledge and management of social groups*, Mureşan A. classifies groups by (Mureşan, 2005): *order of magnitude, temporal stability and degree of completeness interests and permeability, status of inputs and outputs*, as follows:

a. **Order of magnitude** divides groups into:

- *large groups* (teachers, classes and social strata, ethnic groups, nations).
- *middle sized groups* (tens and hundreds), different organizations or institutions, group of streets
- *small groups* such as families, sports teams, music groups, groups of students.

b. **Temporal stability and degree of completeness of interests** are criteria that divide groups as follows:

- *occasional groups* where there is minimal features and common goals and a very short time span (those participating in a trip as show audiences);
- *natural groups* with common interests and long-term goals (family, a collective).

c. **Ontic status** include:

- *real groups*, the members, even if not directly known, are in certain relations, have common features, group exists as such;
- *nominal groups*, where individuals are gathered in groups on paper with the name.

d. **After permeability of inputs and outputs, we have:**

- *closed groups* that have the advantage of more efficiently work even in temporal terms: goals are achieved in a shorter time. Premature departure of members is felt most often dramatically by group dynamics which can influence group processes (recoil, stagnant for a while).

• *open groups* that continually admit new members and also face some early departure. Therefore, open groups are subject to frequent change of members. The advantage of open groups is that it leads to new patterns of behavior, which will then help redefine the rules and practices of the old group. Disadvantage of continue receiving new members is related to the inhibition of the process of opening, decreased confidence in the promised confidentiality. In the open group, members are in different stages of accommodating the group processes.

After **Arbousse-Bastide** (1968), we can distinguish the following types of groups (Arbousse, 1968):

- *action groups* formed to achieve a task;

- *group training*, educational, pedagogical purpose;
- *deliberation group*;
- *groups of decision*;
- *reflection groups*;
- *experimental groups*, which aim to observe what happens in a group.

Jean Maisonneuve (2004) proposed the classification groups by (Maisonneuve, 2004):

- their functions (educational, economic, cultural);
- their training (voluntary, required);
- their mode of access (open or closed).

Classification of work groups may also be due to the activities they practice.

Being the link between the social and the individual level, the group performs the following functions:

- *function to achieve a task*, which is the very reason of the group;
- *differentiated function of satisfaction of needs* of group members;
- *function of maintain the group boundaries* (cohesion and self-regulation), without which it would not be possible to achieve the first two.

Conclusions

Groups are particularly good at combining talents and providing innovative solutions to possible unfamiliar problems; in cases where there is no well established approach/procedure, the wider skill and knowledge set of the group has a distinct advantage over that of an individual.

Groups are like relationships – they take time and energy in order to work properly. In the work place, they constitute an important unit of activity but one whose needs are only recently becoming understood.

Formation of working groups is favored by the fulfillment of certain **conditions**: *physical closeness* between individuals and *work tasks linked*, either by sequence of operations or by common purpose, facilitate interaction and communication; however, the established sustainable relationships between all team members is difficult if *the number* is greater than 12 (number considered by some experts as the upper limit of the small group) and if there are large *differences* between member *status, abilities* or *education*.

When people work in groups there are two separate issues involved. The first one is the tasks and the problems involved in getting the job done. Frequently this is the only issue which the group considers. The second is the process of the group work itself: the mechanisms by which the group acts as a unit and not as a loose rabble. However, without due attention to this process the value of the group can be diminished or even destroyed; yet with a little explicit management of the process, it can enhance the worth of the group to be many times the sum of the worth of its individuals. It is this synergy which makes group work attractive in corporate organizations despite the possible problems (and time spent) in group formation.

The group dynamics concerns the relationship between members of the group in a certain social circumstance. It is essential to study the nature and the dynamic of groups because this can help in finding out how interaction takes place in a group and how members in a certain social setting are affected by outside element.

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