Group Influence

From PsychWiki - A Collaborative Psychology Wiki

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What is a group?

A group is two or more people who, for longer than a few moments, interact with and influence one another and perceive one another as "us."

Social facilitation: How are we affected by the presence of others?

The Mere Presence of others

Ensuring experiments found that others' presence improves the speed with which people do simple multiplication problems and cross out designated letters. It also improves the accuracy with which people perform simple motor tasks, such as keeping a metal stick in contact with a dime-sized disk on a moving turntable. This social facilitation effect, also occurs with animals.

Why are we aroused in the presence of others?

Evaluation apprehension

Evaluation apprehension is concern for how others are evaluation us. It can also help explain 1) Why people perform best when their co-actor is slightly superior. 2) Why arousal lessens when a high-status group is diluted by adding people whose opinions don't matter to us. 3) Why people who worry most about what others think are the ones most affected by their presence. 4) Why social favilitation effects are greatest when the others are unfamiliar and hard to keep an eye on.
The self-consciousness we feel when being evaluated can also interfere with behaviors that we perform best automatically.

**Mere presence**

A good theory is a scientific shorthand: It simplifies and summarizes a variety of observations. Social facilitation theory does this well. It is a simple summary of many research findings. A good theory also offers clear predictions that 1) help confirm or modify the theory, 2) guide new exploration, and 3) suggest practical applications. Social facilitation theory has definitely generated the first two types of predictions: 1) The basics of the theory have been confirmed, and 2) the theory has brought new life to a long dormant field of research.

**Social loafing: Do individuals exert less effort in a group?**

Social facilitation usually occurs when people work toward individual goals and when their efforts, whether winding fishing reels or solving math problems, can be individually evaluated. These situations parallel some everyday work situations, but not those in which people pool their efforts toward a common goal and where individual are not accountable for their efforts.

**Many Hands make Light Work**

Social loafing is the tendency for people to exert less effort when they pool their efforts toward a common goal than when they are individually accountable. In the social loafing experiments, individuals believed they were evaluated only when they acted alone. The group situation decreased evaluation apprehension.

When being observed increases evaluation concerns, social facilitation occurs; when being lost in a crowd decreases evaluation concerns, social loafing occurs. To motivate group members, one strategy is to make individual performance identifiable. Even without pay consequences, actual assembly line workers in one small experiment produced 16 percent more product when their individual output was identified.

**Deindividuation: When do people lose their sense of self in groups?**

**Doing Together what we would not do alone**

Social facilitation experiments show that groups can arouse people. Social loafing experiments show that groups can diffuse responsibility.
Groups can generate a sense of excitement, of being caught up in something bigger than one's self.

When high levels of social arousal combine with diffused responsibility, people may abandon their normal restraints and lose their sense of individuality. Such deindividuation is especially likely when, after being aroused and distracted, people feel anonymity while in a large group or wearing concealing clothing or costumes. The result is diminished self-awareness and self-restraint and increased responsiveness to the immediate situation, be it negative or positive.

**Group polarization: Do groups intensify our opinions?**

Group discussion often strengthens members' initial inclinations. The unfolding of this research on group polarization illustrates the process of unquiry-how an interesting discovery often leads researchers to hasty and erroneous conclusions, which ultimately get replaced with more accurate conclusions.

**Groupthink: Do groups hinder or assist good decisions?**

**Symptoms of Groupthink**

From historical records and the memoirs of participants and observers, Irving Janis identified eight groupthink symptoms. These symptoms are a collective form of dissonance reduction that surface as group members try to maintain their positive group feeling when facing a threat.

The first two groupthink symptoms lead group members to overestimate their group's might and right. 1) An illusion of invulnerability and 2) Unquestioned belief in the group's morality.

Group members also become closed-minded: 1) Rationalization, and 2) Stereotyped view of opponent.

The group suffers from pressures toward uniformity: 1) Conformity pressure, 2) Self-censorship, 3) Illusion of unanimity, and 4) Mindguards.

Groupthink symptoms can produce a failure to seek and discuss contrary information and alternative possibilities.

**Critquing Groupthink**
Experiments suggested that 1) Directive leadership is indeed associated with poorer decisions, sometimes because subordinates feel too weak or insecure to speak up. 2) Groups do prefer supporting over challenging information. 3) When members look to a group for acceptance, approval, and social identity, they may suppress disagreeable thoughts.

**Preventing Groupthink**

For preventing groupthink incorporate many of the effective group procedures such as 1) Be impartial, 2) Enough critical evaluation, 3) Occasionally subdivide the group, then reunited to air differences, 4) Welcome critiques from outside experts and associates, and 5) Before implementing, call a "second chance" meeting to air any lingering doubts.

**Group Problem Solving**

Groups of eyewitness gave accounts that were much more accurate than those provided by the average isolated individual.

People feel more productive when generating ideas in groups. But time and again researchers have found that people working alone usually will generate more good ideas than will the same people in a group.

Vincent Brown and Paul Paulus (2002) have identified three ways to enhance group brainstorming: 1) Combine group and solitary brainstorming, 2) Have group members interact by writing, and 3) Incorporate electronic brainstorming.

**The influence of the minority: How do individuals influence the group?**

If minority viewpoints never prevailed, history would be static and nothing would ever change. In experiments, a minority is most influential when it is consistent and persistent in its views, when its actions convey self-confidence, and after it begins to elicit some defections from the majority. Even if such factors do not persuade the majority to adopt the minority's views, they will increase the majority's self-doubts and prompt it to consider other alternatives, often leading to better, more creative decisions.

Through their task and social leadership, formal and informal group leaders exert disproportionate influence. Those who consistently press toward their goals and exude a self-confident charisma often engender trust and inspire others to follow.