Working in Groups and Teams

Introduction

Group work and team work are an indispensable part of health service delivery. Health workers are part of groups and teams all the time: whether they work in a hospital ward or a clinic, in an immunization program or a rehabilitation department. Groups can either strengthen the quality of health service delivery or weaken it, depending on how well the group functions. For health workers themselves groups are of vital importance: how well a group works can make all the difference between an unbearable work situation and a satisfying one.

In this session we will look at how groups and teams function, what the differences are between them, and how groups can be formed into teams.

Outcomes

By the end of this session, you should be able to:

- Describe the stages of group development.
- Understand the difference between groups and teams.
- Identify group roles.
- Debate the advantages and disadvantages of group work.
- Explain how to develop a group into a team.
- Assess and improve team performance.

Readings

In this session you will be referred to the following readings:


**Working in Groups and Teams**

What is a group? A group can be defined as a collection of people who have regular contact and interact with each other because they share common interests or a common purpose. Would you agree with this definition?

Groups come in different shapes, sizes and levels of formality. One can distinguish between formal and informal groups. A formal group may be a commission, a working group or a departmental group. They are usually set up to perform a particular function within the organization. The staff of a clinic or a ward may also be defined as a group.

Informal groups form more organically, as people are drawn together by a common interest or by the efforts of an individual. Examples of informal groups are: groups of friends, support groups, the boy scouts, or an interest group.

Group membership may not always be voluntary, particularly in formal groups. You may be appointed to a commission, for example, because of your role in an organization; or you are placed in the clinic and become a member of that group of staff, regardless of whether you want to be there or not.

**TASK 1: Identify Groups You Belong To**

Make a list of your personal groups. Distinguish between formal and informal groups, work groups, and groups outside of work.

Consider what role these groups play in your life. How do they help or hinder you in being a complete and active human being and a good professional? Are your experiences with groups positive or negative? We will come back to this question later on in this session.

There has been a large amount of research in the fields of management and industrial psychology, which deals with how groups develop and function. We won't go into the detail of this research and the theories it has generated. However, it is useful for an HR manager to be able to identify key stages and roles in group development in order to better understand what may be going on within a group of people for whom he or she is responsible.

The most accepted theory of group development distinguishes five separate stages. The following is taken from Cook and Hunsaker. (2001: 343-344).
FORMING
Awareness: In a newly formed group, a lot of uncertainties exist about the group's purpose, structure and leadership. They don't have a strategy for addressing the group’s task. As awareness increases, this stage of group development is completed when members accept themselves as a group and commit to group goals.

Commitment
Acceptance

STORMING
Conflict: The next stage involves intra-group conflict about the clarification of roles and behavioral expectations. Disagreement is inevitable as members attempt to decide on task procedures, role assignments, ways of relating, and power allocations. Members have to work through conflict and hostility to get to a sense of acceptance and belonging, which is necessary for the next stage.

Clarification
Belonging

NORMING
Cooperation: Cooperation is the primary theme of the norming stage, which involved the objectives of promoting open communication and increasing cohesion as members establish a common set of behavioral expectations. Members agree on structure that divides work tasks, provides leadership, and allocates other roles.

Involvement
Support

PERFORMING
Productivity: At this stage of development, group members work interdependently to solve problems and are committed to the group’s mission. Productivity is at its peak. For permanent work groups, such as the staff of a clinic, this is hopefully the final and ongoing state of development.

Achievement
Pride

ADJOURNING
Separation: The adjournment or separation phase occurs when temporary groups disband after they have accomplished their goal. Feelings about disbanding can range from sadness and depression at the loss of friendship to happiness about what has been achieved. The leader can facilitate positive closure by recognizing and rewarding group performance.

Recognition
Satisfaction
TASK 2: Reflecting on Group Development

Do you recognize these stages from a group of which you are or were a member?
Spend ten or fifteen minutes reflecting on the process of group development in one such group in terms of whether it fits this model.

Groups change over time and within groups, group members take on different functions and play different roles. Some of you may be familiar with a group exercise which is used in workshops. Group members have to associate themselves or each other with different animals:

The lion who leads, the giraffe who observes from high above, the parrot who chatters and interferes, etc.

Group theory differentiates between three sets of roles: task roles, maintenance roles and personal roles which are detailed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task roles</th>
<th>Maintenance roles</th>
<th>Personal roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiating</td>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>Blocking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving information</td>
<td>Harmonizing</td>
<td>Recognition seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking information</td>
<td>Setting group standards</td>
<td>Dominating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>Gate keeping</td>
<td>Avoiding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaborating</td>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>Seeking help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus testing</td>
<td>Providing feedback</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Group members may play different roles at different times. But they may also identify certain roles for themselves. You may well find a group member who is always the initiator, or another one who is always looking for compromise and harmony. As a manager or a group leader it is important that you recognize these roles, you should also encourage people to place themselves outside of their usual roles.

A good and easy-to-read overview article can be found here. It refers particularly to group development and group roles.

Saylor URL: www.saylor.org/bus208

This work is attributed to the University of the Western Cape’s Free Courseware project, and the original can be found here.
Groups are crucially important for completing tasks and for making organizations work. But groups don't only always offer advantages. There are certainly a number of disadvantages to group problem solving.

The following is a comparative list of some of the advantages and disadvantages of problem solving in groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages groups have over individuals</th>
<th>Disadvantages groups have compared to individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- More knowledge and information. A group of people meeting together to solve a problem has more breadth and, quite often, more depth of experience and knowledge than any one individual.</td>
<td>- Competing goals. Group members often have a prior commitment to other reference groups or have personal agendas that conflict. These differences can lead to disagreement about alternative solutions and destructive conflict.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Domination by a few. A high status, personality, or just an assertive personality can cause certain members to dominate group discussion. If the dominating people do not have the best ideas and those who do keep silent, the quality of the group decision will suffer.</td>
<td>- Time consuming. People have to plan and coordinate group meetings and then wait for everyone to arrive. The processes of being understood, resolving interpersonal conflict, and irrelevant side conversations also detract from group problem-solving efficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ambiguous responsibility. Since no one individual is held responsible for a group's decision, there is often uncertainty about who is accountable for implementing decisions and who gets the credit or blame for outcomes.</td>
<td>- Diversity of viewpoints. A number of people with different experiences can generate more options and creative alternatives. They also bring a greater number of approaches to solving problems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Increased understanding. By participating in the problem-solving process, group members have a better understanding of the decision and why it was made.

• Better implementation. Participation in a decision creates a feeling of ownership of “our decision” versus one by some authority figure. People want to show that they are right and consequently will work hard to implement it themselves as well as encouraging others to do the same.

• Increased acceptance. Group members are also more likely to accept a decision they understand. Also, a participative decision is often perceived as more legitimate than an autocratic decision by a single manager.

There exist a multitude of phenomena that threaten groups, including both group think and social loafing.

Group think is defined as the state of affairs in a group when the desire or pressure to conform within the group is so strong that members either think alike or cannot appraise alternative options to a problem anymore. With this, the central purpose of a group, to bring together diverse skills, experiences, and approaches is significantly diminished.

Social loafing is a phenomenon most of us will know. It refers to group members who, protected by the group, will not make an effort to contribute. To have a social loafer in the group initially is irritating, but may not be much more. However, a dangerous dynamic can develop: if other group members reduce their input because they feel that others are not doing their “fair share”, (based on a subjective assessment), the productivity of the group may continuously decrease, eventually rendering the group defunct. A manager has to guard against such developments, e.g. by requesting frequent feedback and frequently assessing outputs. Research seems to indicate that social loafing is less common when group members expect their outputs to be measured.
Teams

We have looked at groups in some detail. Now how are teams different? Quite often the terms are used interchangeably, and we would argue that the difference is not a fundamental one.

But there is one key difference: groups are a number of people thrown together to perform a task. Teams consist of a number of people who are carefully selected and welded together to work together. Cook and Hunsaker use sports teams as an illustration, which makes the difference very obvious. Bringing a bunch of soccer players together to play makes them a group of soccer players, but not a team. They will all know how to play soccer, but they may well not be very good at playing together. To become a team, they have to train together, they have to work out who is good at what, and who can best play in what position, they have to trust each other and have confidence in each others’ ability. That is how a soccer team is built. The same principles apply for any other team, including work teams. One can assume that when groups have reached the fourth stage of their development (Performing), they will have welded into a team.

In preparing for this module, we did a very quick internet search to see what is available electronically. Using the Altavista Search Engine (www.altavista.com), we typed in teamwork as a keyword, and the computer threw up thousands of internet references within a few seconds, most of them concerned with the building of teams in companies.

One reading we found very useful is Alan Bateman’s text on teambuilding. It is very clearly written and practice-oriented, offering a number of useful explanations and definitions. In particular, it highlights the inter-connectedness of working in teams, leadership (discussed in the previous session) and motivation (to be discussed in Session 3). What Bateman is saying is that teams can only work with good leadership and when people are motivated to work together. In addition, good motivation and leadership can have a very positive effect on teams.

**TASK 3: Ingredients for Good Teambuilding**


This text summarizes in simple and practical terms, what you need in order to build a good team. Use the exercise on pages 6-7 to complete Task 4 below.
A note on team building techniques:

There are dozens of techniques aimed at building and maintaining teams, but no singular easy-to-use recipe. Working with people is complex and defies recipes. We believe two key factors will assist a human resource manager to successfully work with groups:

1. To understand the needs, skills, aspirations and limitations of the people (s)he works with, whether individually or in groups;

2. To keep working at it. To know that individuals, groups and teams need to be continually nurtured, assessed and developed.

This is not to say that techniques and models are not useful. If you want to know more about the area, by all means, you should explore it. But in a module such as this, which provides an overview of a range of topics in HR management, it is impossible to go into great depth for every topic.

TASK 4: Analyze a Group or Team You Know

You have already learned a fair amount about group functions, roles and developmental stages. Apply these new insights to assess a group or team you are a member of or know well.

Go through all the above steps, including an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages, as they apply to your group.

Summary

In this session we have explored the ins and outs of group and team dynamics, how they tend to function, and their many advantages and disadvantages.