

NATURE AND FORMATION OF GROUPS

Introduction: Importance of Groups in Everyday Life

Human life is deeply embedded in group contexts. From morning interactions within the family to discussions in school and engagement with friends, individuals continuously function as members of various groups.

These groups provide not only emotional support and security but also play a crucial role in shaping personality, attitudes, and behaviour. The absence of such group affiliations often produces a sense of incompleteness, indicating that groups are essential for psychological well-being and social development.

At the same time, the relationship between individuals and groups is reciprocal. While groups influence the behaviour, thoughts, and actions of individuals, individuals themselves also possess the capacity to influence group processes and, ultimately, society.

Nature of Groups: Meaning and Characteristics

A group may be defined as an organised system of two or more individuals who interact with each other, are interdependent, share common motives, and follow structured role relationships and norms regulating their behaviour. This definition highlights that a group is not merely a collection of people, but a structured and dynamic social unit.

One of the most important characteristics of a group is the **sense of belongingness or identity**. Members perceive themselves as part of the group, which distinguishes one group from another. This shared identity forms the basis of group cohesion and unity.

Another essential feature is the presence of **common motives and goals**. Groups exist either to achieve certain objectives or to protect members from threats. These shared goals guide group functioning and give direction to collective efforts.

Groups are also characterised by **interdependence**, meaning that the actions of one member affect others. For instance, in a sports team, the performance of one player can influence the outcome for the entire group.

Further, group members **interact with each other**, either directly through face-to-face communication or

indirectly through other means. This interaction is not random but structured through **roles and norms**. Roles define expected patterns of behaviour, while norms act as guidelines specifying how members should behave in different situations.

Groups and Other Collections of People

It is important to distinguish groups from other collections such as crowds, audiences, and mobs. A **crowd** is a temporary gathering of individuals without structure, interdependence, or shared identity. Behaviour in crowds is often irrational and lacks coordination.

An **audience** is also a collection of people assembled for a specific purpose, such as watching a match or a movie. Although generally passive, audiences can sometimes transform into mobs under intense emotional conditions. A **mob** is characterised by impulsivity, emotional intensity, and homogeneity in thought and action.

A **team**, on the other hand, is a special type of group. Unlike ordinary groups, teams involve members with complementary skills who are committed to a common goal and are mutually accountable. Teams exhibit positive synergy, where collective performance exceeds individual contributions.

Why Do People Join Groups?

Individuals join groups because groups fulfil several important needs. One of the primary reasons is **security**. Being part of a group reduces feelings of vulnerability and provides a sense of protection.

Groups also offer **status and recognition**. Membership in a prestigious group enhances one's social standing and creates a sense of pride.

Another significant reason is the enhancement of **self-esteem**. Groups contribute to a positive self-concept by providing a sense of identity and worth.

Groups also satisfy **psychological and social needs**, such as belongingness, affection, and the desire for interaction. They provide opportunities for giving and receiving attention and support.

In addition, groups facilitate **goal achievement**. Certain objectives cannot be achieved individually, and collective effort becomes necessary. Thus, groups enable

individuals to accomplish tasks that would otherwise be difficult or impossible.

Finally, groups serve as a source of **knowledge and information**, helping individuals broaden their perspectives and make informed decisions.

Group Formation: Conditions and Determinants

Group formation is based on interaction among individuals, which is facilitated by several factors. One of the most important factors is **proximity**. Physical closeness increases the likelihood of interaction, which in turn promotes familiarity and the development of relationships.

Another factor is **similarity**. Individuals are more likely to form groups with those who share similar attitudes, interests, and values. Similarity provides psychological comfort and reinforces one's beliefs, making interactions more satisfying.

Finally, **common motives and goals** play a crucial role in group formation. Individuals with shared objectives come together to form groups that help them achieve these goals collectively.

Groups do not form instantly; rather, they develop through a series of stages. According to Tuckman, group development involves five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning.

In the **forming stage**, members experience uncertainty about the group's purpose, structure, and their own roles. There is a mixture of excitement and apprehension as individuals attempt to understand each other.

The **storming stage** is marked by conflict and disagreement. Members may differ over goals, leadership, and distribution of responsibilities. This stage is essential for clarifying roles and establishing a hierarchy within the group.

In the **norming stage**, group members develop shared norms and values, leading to a sense of cohesion and identity. Conflicts are resolved, and cooperation increases.

The **performing stage** represents effective functioning. The group structure becomes stable, and members work collaboratively towards achieving group goals.

Finally, in some groups, there is an **adjourning stage**, where the group disbands after completing its task. However, it is important to note that these stages are not always linear; groups may skip stages or move back and forth between them.

Group Structure: Key Elements

As groups develop, they acquire a structure consisting of roles, norms, status, and cohesiveness.

Roles refer to socially defined expectations regarding behaviour in a particular position. Each member performs specific functions that contribute to group functioning.

Norms are shared expectations about appropriate behaviour. These "unspoken rules" guide members' actions and maintain order within the group.

Status denotes the relative position or prestige of a member within the group. Status may be **ascribed**, based on factors like age or seniority, or **achieved**, based on competence and performance.

Cohesiveness refers to the degree of attraction among group members. A highly cohesive group exhibits strong



GROUP DEVELOPMENT, STRUCTURE, AND TYPES

Stages of Group Formation (Tuckman's Model)

unity and commitment. However, excessive cohesiveness may lead to negative consequences such as groupthink.

Groupthink: A Consequence of Excessive Cohesion

Groupthink occurs when the desire for unanimity overrides critical evaluation of alternatives. In such situations, members suppress dissenting opinions and conform to the majority view, leading to poor decision-making.

This phenomenon is characterised by an illusion of consensus, overconfidence in the group's decisions, and neglect of potential risks. The example of the Vietnam War illustrates how groupthink can result in disastrous outcomes.

To prevent groupthink, it is important to encourage open discussion, consider alternative viewpoints, seek external opinions, and promote critical thinking within the group.

Types of Groups

Groups can be classified into different types based on their characteristics.

Primary groups are small, intimate, and involve close personal relationships, such as family and close friends. These groups play a crucial role in shaping an individual's values and identity.

In contrast, **secondary groups** are larger, more impersonal, and formed for specific purposes. Membership is often voluntary, and relationships are less emotionally intense.

Formal groups are structured and governed by rules, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Organisations such as schools and offices are examples of formal groups.

Informal groups, on the other hand, are based on personal relationships and arise spontaneously without formal rules.

Another important distinction is between **ingroup and outgroup**. The ingroup refers to one's own group, associated with feelings of belonging and positive evaluation. The outgroup refers to other groups, often perceived negatively.

The **minimal group paradigm** demonstrates that even arbitrary group distinctions can lead to ingroup favouritism, highlighting the powerful role of social categorisation.



GROUP INFLUENCE ON INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOUR

Nature of Group Influence

Groups exert a significant influence on individual behaviour, affecting performance, attitudes, and decision-making. The presence of others can either enhance or hinder performance depending on the situation.

Social Facilitation

Social facilitation refers to the tendency for individuals to perform better on well-learned tasks when in the presence of others. The presence of others creates arousal, which enhances performance in familiar activities. However, for complex or unfamiliar tasks, performance may decline.

Social Loafing

Social loafing is the tendency for individuals to exert less effort when working on a group task compared to when working alone. This occurs because individual contributions are not easily identifiable, leading to reduced accountability.

Experimental studies, such as those conducted by Latane, show that as group size increases, individual effort decreases, even though the total output of the group may increase.

Several factors contribute to social loafing. These include diffusion of responsibility, lack of individual evaluation, absence of competition, poor coordination, and weak group identification.

To reduce social loafing, it is important to make individual contributions identifiable, increase accountability, emphasise the importance of the task, and strengthen group cohesiveness.

Group Polarisation

Group polarisation refers to the tendency of groups to make more extreme decisions than individuals. After group discussion, initial opinions become stronger, leading to more extreme positions.

This occurs for several reasons. First, individuals are exposed to new arguments supporting their views, which strengthens their beliefs. Second, the presence of like-minded individuals validates one's opinions, creating a bandwagon effect. Third, identification with the group leads to conformity, further reinforcing initial tendencies.

Group polarisation can have serious consequences, as it may lead to risky or excessively cautious decisions.