

Group Dynamics

Every group needs to have clear and agreed to goals. These goals must be specific, achievable and measurable and they must be consistent with the nature and purpose of the group. Groups normally have Long Range Goals which establish why the group is meeting and express its overall purpose. Its Short Range Goals determine specific things to be achieved and give direction to particular periods (e.g. *planning activities*).

The aims or expectations of a group need to be agreed to by the group members. Frustrations can occur if people have confused or unclear expectations. If some find the expectations of others too different from their own, or believe their needs will not be met in a group, they can avoid conflict and frustration by opting out at an early stage. .

The ideal size for a small group is 8-12 people.

Socrates said 'the unexamined life is not worth living'. Any group needs to review its life against its established goals. If this is not done there will be an informal evaluation done in the form of criticism. Evaluation should be concerned with how **each** individual is experiencing the situation; what interaction is occurring and how people's relationships are functioning. Reviewing leadership is integral to the evaluation of the group. The group can address any changes that are needed to meet their aims, and affirm the good that exists in the group.

There are four areas to consider in evaluation:

Purpose: Are we achieving our purpose ?

Content: Are we learning. growing and enjoying ?

Process: How well are we working/growing together ?

Growth: What has happened to us as individuals ?

Evaluation is best done at a specific meeting. Each member should contribute to it, so it needs to be 'advertised' in advance or planned for. Those unable to attend ought to be briefed afterwards of the outcome. The review ought not be rushed and should take place in surroundings that allow good communication (each person can hear and be seen) and noise and other distractions are minimised.

Face-to-face evaluation is preferable, but some aid (such as a questionnaire) can be helpful to allow personal evaluation to be shared, rather than people feel threatened, dominated or coerced into agreeing with others. A questionnaire could be distributed prior to the meeting. If the review can be done creatively (especially using symbols) it will be less threatening, more honest and more enjoyable. Three examples of creative evaluations would be:

1. Creating a group collage (Use crayons or paints; no rules)
2. Drawing using symbols (e.g. fishing fleet)
3. Body sculpture

Whichever form of evaluation is used, it is important to give clear instructions and a definite time. The way members undertake the activity will reflect their relationship with the group so this is part of the review. Members ought to be invited to reflect on their original expectations; high and low points; how it feels to be in the group; how they would like it to be. It could help to ask what story each person would tell to describe what it means to belong to the group.

The evaluation will clarify and agree on major and minor goals and consider what is needed to achieve these better. Members will assess the effectiveness of the group, the communication at all levels and it

will assess the leadership. When the situation is known to be complex or difficult, it is wise to have an outside person facilitate the process.

It helps to always link 'Review' with 'planning'. A suitable time for review is at a set period of time (e.g. annually) at a time of crisis, or at a time of change in leadership.

TYPES OF LEADERSHIP

Autocratic:

The group has no say over its own life. The leaders make all the decisions without consulting members.

The next outing will be a picnic. Everyone will meet outside the shed in Hillary Park at 12.00pm.

Directive:

The group has little say over its own life. The leaders may consult members but still make most of the decisions themselves and offer most suggestions with or without the member's agreement.

We've checked with everybody and there are several different suggestions, so we've decided to have a picnic at Hillary Park. We'd like everyone to meet at 12.00pm

Authoritative:

The leaders give the group firm direction. They consult the group when appropriate and do not apologise for having a particular vision.

We thought it would be good to have a picnic at Hilary Park for our next outing. Would you be happy with that idea ?

Democratic:

The group has a great deal of say over its own life. The leaders consult members concerning decisions and act according to the group's desires. Members feel free to make decisions.

We would like to hear more suggestions for the next outing. There have been several good suggestions so it would be good for us to choose together what we think is the best idea.

Laissez Faire:

The group has all the say over its own life. No one takes responsibility for decision making, and organisation of the life of the group is left to the group itself.

It's up to you what you want to do. We're just part of the group. It doesn't matter much to us.

Questions

What are we doing?

Is what we doing working?

If not, what do we need to (plan to) do?

What action will we take