**Archives of Business Research – Vol. 9, No. 8**
**Publication Date:** August 25, 2021
**DOI**:10.14738/abr.98.10595.
Zhang, X. (2021). Group Process, Groupthink, and Leadership. Archives of Business Research, 9(8). 1-7.

# Group Process, Groupthink, and Leadership

**Xiaoliang Zhang**
Department of Leadership Studies
Louisiana State University Shreveport
LDSH 823: Social and Group Dynamics

Group-related topics are a typical theme in the field of psychology, management, and leadership. This paper illustrates the research and findings regarding the differentiation between the concept of groups and teams, group development model and process, group decision-making analysis and techniques, and discussions of the significant issues in group settings, such as social loafing, cohesiveness, and groupthink. This writing points out the leader's role in groups during different stages and provides implications and suggestions for leaders and managers in dealing with those issues.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Group versus Team

A group is described as at least two or more individuals who actively interact with each other and work together to accomplish specific goals and objectives (Robbins & Judge, 2018). The words Team and Group are often viewed as the same concept, they are interchangeable, and the boundary line is ambiguous in most cases. Although both terms indicate 'more than one individual work together toward a goal, there are significant differences between them in certain circumstances due to their unique traits. Group refers to members mainly collaborating to exchange ideas and data to assist every group member so that everyone's job is done more successfully and efficiently. Group members don't need to conduct collective work that needs joint effort involved. A team forms when group members use their constructive synergy and complementary skills; everyone in the group is held accountable with shared responsibilities, strives to achieve a particular goal (Robbins & Coulter, 2017). To some extent, group outcome equals the summation of everyone's inputs, while the team outcome is greater than the sum of individual's inputs.

When assessing the unique traits of group and team from different facets, Katzenbach & Smith (1993) had drawn the following conclusion. In teams, the leadership role is shared by all team member, while there is one specific leader is clearly in change of the whole group; each team member holds themself not only accountable to themselves but also to the team as a whole, while each group member are solely responsible to themselves in group; team creates very specific and clear objective and purpose, while the purpose of a group is the same as the organization's purpose; a team's work is always accomplished collectively but a group's work is completed individually; meetings in a team features cooperative problem-solving effort and open-ended discussion, but meetings in a group features only efficiency, there is no co-efficiency or collaboration involved and open-ended discussion does not exist ; performance appraisal in team is directly evaluated and measured by the joint-effort outputs, while in group, performance is estimated indirectly based on its influence on others; the tasks in a team sitting

is determined and settled by all team members together, while the tasks are set by the particular group leader and delegated to the individual group members; a team can rapidly formed, deployed, and dismissed, while group cannot (Fazzari & Mosca, 2009)

**Stages of Group Development**

Scholars studied and analyzed how a group is formed, developed and groups' unique traits at different stages of its development. One of the most popular groups development models was founded by Tuckman & Jensen (1977). Their study concluded that a group would go through five different stages from the beginning when it is made until it becomes fully developed and matured.

The first stage is Forming. As for how it is named, this stage is mainly about group establishment. During this stage, group members first meet each other; everyone knows nothing or very little about group members. Everyone shows assertive, independent behavior and attitude. Because every group member wants to fit in the group and be acknowledged by other members, therefore, everyone acts in their best way to impress others, avoid any possible conflict, and get recognized into the group. Every group member is highly motivated to get ready and be a part of the group, but no one knows what precisely they are expected to perform as a member due to the lack of information. Just because of the upcoming unknown and uncertainty, individuals would concentrate on group members' actual roles and responsibilities. Individuals are eager to find out what needs to be accomplished while collecting and gathering information to clarify the uncertainty. Group members start forming a sense and impression about each other and the task. This stage is critical because this is the foundation of a group development process, it sets the tone, and members transition from strangers to their group members. This stage's spirit is for group members to get familiar with the group vibe, peers, and the task itself. It's similar to the first day of a college class. Students go to a classroom and get to know who the classmates and instructor are, what assignments and homework are required, the due days, and how the class is structured. Leaders in this stage would set clear objectives and provide distinct guidelines. Group members learn what exactly they need to achieve and to meet the goals that the leader sets. During this stage, there won't be any actual assignments that need to be complete, and members begin for the first time to view themself as a part of the group.

The second stage is Storming. This stage is named due to the significant element that's involved, which is intragroup conflict. Because group members never worked with each other before, everyone now needs to tolerate others' new ideas and behaviors, individual differences, and the disagreement and collision caused by who will take the lead and control the group. Group members in this stage start looking for rules and making policies to end the rising conflict. Whether or not a group will eventually move out of this stage and head to the next one heavily rely on the members' maturity level. Immature members might attempt to approve to others why "their ways are the best ways." This stage can hurt a group by decreasing the motivation, and the group vibe becomes unpleasant to those who averse to the conflict. Some members may run out of their patience and enthusiasm, and some members may look forward to the forming stage's peace and comfort. The role of leadership during the Storming phase is to guide the group decision-making process and help to maintain professionalism within the group. Leaders should stand out and ensure that group members stay on track towards achieving the goal rather than being distracted by emotional conflict and other barriers. Leaders need to

demonstrate some coaching skills to address issues, solve conflict and make members realize the importance of the task.

The third stage is Norming. This is when members' relationships get significantly improved, and cohesiveness is found in the group. The group now displays prominent and unique group identity, and group norms also come in place. After members have finally used ways to solve conflicts and issues that appeared in the Storming stage, members understand each other more and look at each other from a brand-new perspective. The individual's mindset changed, members now how to work alongside with each other, and how to appreciate different ideas, insights, and motive of others. Norming stage is when the rapid growth of a group takes place. Group's overall effectiveness gets boosted along with the rising cohesion and solidarity. All members are voluntarily committed to the group, individual's role and responsibility are no longer blurred, and the trust among members reaches the peak. Under the big picture of group development booming during this stage, some members might adjust their behavior and work habits to make group work more efficient. Lastly, because individuals take the initiative to do their own part of the task, the leader's role from solely maintaining peacefulness, solving conflict, providing guidance, and shift to spending more time on facilitating the group as a whole and empowering the members. It needs to be pointed out that most members by now would avoid any changes that can potentially break the norm that they have been striven to maintain. Members are afraid that any variables could cause the group to go back to the Storming stage. In this stage, the group might lose their innovation and creativity because members unconsciously prioritize keeping the norming behavior over adapting to the change. Groupthink is likely to link and occur in this stage.

The fourth stage is Performing. For permanent groups, they have finally reached the final step. They started from getting to know the peers and task, going through challenges, establishing group norms and strategies, and eventually get to this point where the group is functioning smoothly. All group members are working harmoniously on the group goal towards completion. The nature of a group is task-driven-oriented. Members at this stage treat achieving the task as their motivation. Only successful groups will arrive in this stage because it indicates that this group possesses a high level in many areas, including group loyalty, identity, cohesiveness, productivity, and efficiency. As the final stage for permanent groups, some groups might seek consultation from the leader about their personal development. In this case, those groups could undergo the previous stages again because the leader's advice could drive the group's current norm and dynamic back to the Storming stage, depends on the nature and the intensity of the consultation.

The fifth stage is Adjourning. This is the final stage for temporary groups, such as a taskforce group or a project team, or any groups with a limited number of tasks to complete. Temporary groups in this stage get ready to dismiss, as the group's mission is in its final chapter, group members are about to gather and wrap up the project. All group members see that the assignment is over and it's time to leave the group. All members have a strong sense and awareness of what they have accomplished and their work quality. Leaders now should make the closing remark by acknowledging the group's final achievements and appreciating everyone's contribution. Some members in this stage would grow the sadness and being a little emotional as they see "the farewell is around the corner." Leaders should encourage members to be thankfully for having the chance to work with their peers in such an engaged, developed,

and well-functioned group. Leaders can also express their wishes about having the same group again formed for the next task.

The five-staged group model considers that groups will be fully developed and mature by going through these five stages regarding their overall performance towards achieving the final goal. However, groups may not always smoothly enter the new stage from the previous stage due to the unpredictable and predictable variables. Some groups can shift back and forth between stages in consideration of the member change. Leaders should guide the group moving toward the performance stage. Meanwhile, have the awareness that due to the resistance to change caused by human nature, some people may treat a particular stage as their comfort zone and enjoy staying in that stage rather than keep moving forward (Robbins & Judge, 2018). Research also indicates that the five-stage model is just a general framework that displays group development flow. There is no guarantee that a group's progress at its best when going through from Forming to Performing. This model can be a great source to assist leaders in managing and understanding the groups by following a broad pattern. It also requires leaders to develop personalized alternatives that fit in a particular group at a specific time during a particular stage when unique and unusual problems appear. Group dynamic and effectiveness is a complex topic, and it reacts differently when either more or fewer factors involved (Hackman, 1998)

## Issues and Arguments

### *Groupthink*

When Individuals join a group, everyone desires to be acknowledged and accepted by the group. Therefore, individuals are influenced under the pressure of conformity. When members have different insights, ideas, and voices that are different from the rest of the group members or the majority of the rest, individuals tend to be pressured by aligning their behavior or opinions to conform to the others in the group. Groupthink emerges at this point. According to Turner & Pratkanis (1997), groupthink comes along when every member has the mindset of protecting and sustaining the group's positive image and when an external or internal threat could potentially damage this positive image by any means.

There are several methods that leaders today can adopt to minimize groupthink. First, control the group size. Group size has a considerable impact on group performance and satisfaction. What a group tries to achieve is determines the intensity of this influence (Thomas & Fink, 1963).

A smaller group could solve a simple problem faster than a larger group. But when the group task is more complicated and analysis-based, the larger group seems to have more advantage to handle it. When group size gets too big, it's hard to hold every individual accountable, and it might create other issues such as social loafing. Second, the group leader should collect input from all group members and try not to deliver too much of their views. Group leaders possess a higher status in the group comparing with members. Research shows that status plays a critical role in the pressure to conform. A higher status member has a better ability to resist the groupthink caused by conformity (Hackman, 1992). Therefore, if leaders express too much of their opinion, it will make all group members conform to the leader and eventually aggravates the groupthink level. Third, having someone to play the devil's advocate role. Leaders can secretly select a group member to be the one that always brings up different voices and challenge the norm. The benefit is that it stimulates members to look at the existing ideas from

a different angle and develop new creative ideas. Leaders can also encourage members to discuss the dark side of any decisions first before analyzing and touching the bright side (Robbins & Judge, 2018).

### *Social Loafing*

This happens when groups only put emphasis on the group level performance but neglect the individual's input. Individuals stop putting effort into the group because their value and contribution are not being recognized. The findings from Comer (1995) show group size have a direct impact on social loafing. When the group size is large, individuals tend to reduce their effort than when working in a smaller group or working alone. This raises the argument about whether the group's overall performance is always equal to the summation of the group members' inputs. In other words, 2+2 can equal 3 when there is a social loafer in the group; it can also equal to 5 when there are super performers in the group (Robbins, 2015). There is no standard number that defines how many individuals a group should have to help a group perform its best. But the larger group could create negative synergy because some members spend less effort in a group setting than on an individual basis.

Research from Smrt & Karau (2011) reveals that individuals are less likely to become social loafer when they have a higher work ethic. Other research suggests that leaders should take the following actions to prevent having "free-riders" in groups. 1. Build clear group goals for group members to work toward. 2. Increase intergroup competition. 3. Make peer evaluation/ appraisal a mandate, which will help to exhibit individual's contributions. 4. Leader need to spend time to search and only select the right group members, who are self-motivated and like to work in a collaborative environment. 5. Keep in mind of "law of effect" and "reinforcement theory" -which is people do what they do because what happens to them when they do it. If leaders expect group members to act in their best, a rewards system and motivation strategy are necessary. Making sure to reward the individual instead of the group as a whole is the key (Gunnthorsdottir & Rapoport, 2006).

According to the mountains of research, the social loafing issue exists in both 'group' and 'team'. Leaders need to create detailed measurements and provide means to identify individual input. Otherwise, the group's overall performance will suffer from social loafer's "low or zero" contribution and the burn-out from top performers.

### *Cohesiveness*

Cohesiveness is also tied to group productivity. When group members love the group, the norm, and have the willingness to share responsibility, there is cohesiveness (Mullen & Copper, 1994). Study shows the high cohesiveness with high norms gives higher productivity. Cohesiveness can be created in many ways, and the following methods are what research advocates leaders to promote: 1. Smaller group. 2. Encourage necessary arguments regarding group goals. 3. Having members to spend more time together for building relationships. 4. Use proper ways to promote intergroup competition. 5. Reward the group as a whole rather than reward the individuals. 6. Providing group with their own working space (Greer, 2012).

## Group Decision-Making techniques

There are three primary techniques that leaders can help groups to make creative decisions.

### *Brainstorming*

Overcoming the pressure of conformity is this technique's most prominent feature (Wagstaff, 2002). During brainstorming, leaders begin by straightforwardly stating the problem and ensure members fully understand. Then, members are allowed to come up with any solutions they can think of. No one gets criticized or laughed at because this technique is all about stimulating new ideas and renovations.

### *Nominal Group Technique*

No discussion is allowed in this technique. Members will still meet up to make decisions so that they don't lose the connection with peers. Members are required to write down a list of their solutions and ideas to a problem. Both Brainstorming and Nominal Group Technique are fantastic ways to minimize the effect of groupthink and makes for growing new thoughts and ideas (Andersen & Fagerhaug, 2000)

### *Electronic meetings*

This method required members to type their comments and thoughts on computers. Everyone's comments will show on a shared screen without everyone's name attached. The only disadvantage of this technique is every member's typing speed is different. The fastest typer may not have the best idea, but it provides clues for the other. Therefore, when the final decision comes out, it's hard to determine who should receive the credit (Burdett, 2000).

## CONCLUSION

This paper selected some major components in group-related topics to discuss by using published articles from the industry as the foundation. This writing begins with comparing the Group and Team concept; lists one of the popular group development models with the analysis of each stage; describes three issues in the field of group study; and briefly mentions three group decision-making techniques. Along with addressing the group process, there are suggested implications for leaders and managers to handle relevant group issues.

## References

Andersen, B., & Fagerhaug, T. (2000). The Nominal Group Technique. *Quality Progress*, *33*(2), 144.

Burdett, J. (2000). Changing Channels : Using the Electronic Meeting System to Increase Equity in Decision Making.

Comer, D. R. (1995). A model of social loafing in real work groups. *Human Relations*, *48*(6), 647–667. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lsus.edu/10.1177/001872679504800603

Fazzari, A. J., & Mosca, J. B. (2009). "Partners in perfection": Human resources facilitating creation and ongoing implementation of self-managed manufacturing teams in a small medium enterprise. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, *20*(3), 353–376. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.20017

Gunnthorsdottir, A., & Rapoport, A. (2006). Embedding social dilemmas in intergroup competition reduces free-riding. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *101*(2), 184–199. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lsus.edu/10.1016/j.obhdp.2005.08.005

Greer, L. L. (2012). Group cohesion: Then and now. *Small Group Research*, *43*(6), 655–661. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lsus.edu/10.1177/1046496412461532

Hackman, J. R. (1998). Why teams don't work. In R. S. Tindale, L. Heath, J. Edwards, E. J. Posavac, F. B. Bryant, Y. Suarez-Balcazar, E. Henderson-King, & J. Myers (Eds.), *Theory and research on small groups.* (pp. 245–267). Plenum Press

Hackman, J. R. (1992). Group influences on individuals in organizations. In M. D. Dunnette & L. M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology., Vol. 3, 2nd ed.* (pp. 199–267). Consulting Psychologists Press

Katzenbach, J. R., & Smith, D. K. (1993). The discipline of teams. *Harvard Business Review, 71*(2), 111–120.

Mullen, B., & Copper, C. (1994). The relation between group cohesiveness and performance: An integration. *Psychological Bulletin*, *115*(2), 210–227. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lsus.edu/10.1037/0033-2909.115.2.210

Robbins, S. P., & Judge, T. A. (2018). *Essentials of organizational behavior* (14th ed., pp. 137–137; 155-155). Pearson.

Robbins, S. P., & Coulter, M. K. (2017). *Management* (14th ed., pp. 428–429). Pearson.

Robbins, S. P., & Judge., T. A. (2009). In *Organizational behavior* (pp. 286–287). Pearson/Prentice Hall.

Robbins, S. P. (2015). In *The truth about managing people: proven insights to get the best from your team* (4th ed., pp. 178–179). Pearson Education.

Smrt, D. L., & Karau, S. J. (2011). Protestant work ethic moderates social loafing. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, *15*(3), 267–274. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lsus.edu/10.1037/a0024484

Thomas, E. J., & Fink, C. F. (1963). Effects of group size. *Psychological Bulletin*, *60*(4), 371–384. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lsus.edu/10.1037/h0047169

Tuckman, B. W., & Jensen, M. A. (1977). Stages of small-group development revisited. *Group & Organization Studies*, *2*(4), 419–427. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lsus.edu/10.1177/105960117700200404

Turner, M. E., & Pratkanis, A. R. (1997). Mitigating groupthink by stimulating constructive conflict. In C. K. W. De Dreu & E. Van de Vliert (Eds.), *Using conflict in organizations.* (pp. 53–71). Sage Publications, Inc. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lsus.edu/10.4135/9781446217016.n5

Wagstaff, J. (2002). Brainstorming Requires Drinks. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, *165*(17), 34.