

3.8.3: Small Group Dynamics

Learning Objectives

1. Explain the relationship between group cohesion and group climate.
2. Describe the process of group member socialization.
3. Explain the relationship between conformity and groupthink.
4. Define various types of group conflict and identify strategies for managing each type.

Any time a group of people come together, new dynamics are put into place that differ from the dynamics present in our typical dyadic interactions. The impressions we form about other people's likeability and the way we think about a group's purpose are affected by the climate within a group that is created by all members. Groups also develop norms, and new group members are socialized into a group's climate and norms just as we are socialized into larger social and cultural norms in our everyday life. The pressure to conform to norms becomes more powerful in group situations, and some groups take advantage of these forces with positive and negative results. Last, the potential for productive and destructive conflict increases as multiple individuals come together to accomplish a task or achieve a purpose. This section explores the dynamics mentioned previously in order to better prepare you for future group interactions.

Group Cohesion and Climate

When something is cohesive, it sticks together, and the cohesion within a group helps establish an overall group climate. Group climate refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members. To better understand cohesion and climate, we can examine two types of cohesion: task and social.

Task cohesion refers to the commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group. Social cohesion refers to the attraction and liking among group members. Ideally, groups would have an appropriate balance between these two types of cohesion relative to the group's purpose, with task-oriented groups having higher task cohesion and relational-oriented groups having higher social cohesion. Even the most task-focused groups need some degree of social cohesion, and vice versa, but the balance will be determined by the purpose of the group and the individual members. For example, a team of workers from the local car dealership may join a local summer softball league because they're good friends and love the game. They may end up beating the team of faculty members from the community college who joined the league just to get to know each other better and have an excuse to get together and drink beer in the afternoon. In this example, the players from the car dealership exhibit high social and task cohesion, while the faculty exhibit high social but low task cohesion.

Cohesion benefits a group in many ways and can be assessed through specific group behaviors and characteristics. Groups with an appropriate level of cohesiveness (Hargie, 2011)

- set goals easily;
- exhibit a high commitment to achieving the purpose of the group;
- are more productive;
- experience fewer attendance issues;
- have group members who are willing to stick with the group during times of difficulty;
- have satisfied group members who identify with, promote, and defend the group;
- have members who are willing to listen to each other and offer support and constructive criticism; and
- experience less anger and tension.

Appropriate levels of group cohesion usually create a positive group climate, since group climate is affected by members' satisfaction with the group. Climate has also been described as group morale. Following are some qualities that contribute to a positive group climate and morale (Marston & Hecht, 1988):

- **Participation.** Group members feel better when they feel included in discussion and a part of the functioning of the group.
- **Messages.** Confirming messages help build relational dimensions within a group, and clear, organized, and relevant messages help build task dimensions within a group.
- **Feedback.** Positive, constructive, and relevant feedback contribute to group climate.
- **Equity.** Aside from individual participation, group members also like to feel as if participation is managed equally within the group and that appropriate turn taking is used.

- **Clear and accepted roles.** Group members like to know how status and hierarchy operate within a group. Knowing the roles isn't enough to lead to satisfaction, though—members must also be comfortable with and accept those roles.
- **Motivation.** Member motivation is activated by perceived connection to and relevance of the group's goals or purpose.



Figure 3.8.3.1 Cohesion and shared identity help create symbolic convergence as group members develop a group identity and shared social reality. Ram K – [Watching the big game](#) – CC BY-NC 2.0.

Group cohesion and climate is also demonstrated through symbolic convergence (Bormann, 1985). Symbolic convergence refers to the sense of community or group consciousness that develops in a group through non-task-related communication such as stories and jokes. The originator of symbolic convergence theory, Ernest Bormann, claims that the sharing of group fantasies creates symbolic convergence. *Fantasy*, in this sense, doesn't refer to fairy tales, sexual desire, or untrue things. In group communication, group fantasies are verbalized references to events outside the "here and now" of the group, including references to the group's past, predictions for the future, or other communication about people or events outside the group (Griffin, 2009). For example, as a graduate student, I spent a lot of time talking with others in our small group about research, writing, and other things related to our classes and academia in general. Most of this communication wouldn't lead to symbolic convergence or help establish the strong social bonds that we developed as a group. Instead, it was our grad student "war stories" about excessive reading loads and unreasonable paper requirements we had experienced in earlier years of grad school, horror stories about absent or vindictive thesis advisors, and "you won't believe this" stories from the classes that we were teaching that brought us together.

In any group, you can tell when symbolic convergence is occurring by observing how people share such fantasies and how group members react to them. If group members react positively and agree with or appreciate the teller's effort or other group members are triggered to tell their own related stories, then convergence is happening and cohesion and climate are being established. Over time, these fantasies build a shared vision of the group and what it means to be a member that creates a shared group consciousness. By reviewing and applying the concepts in this section, you can hopefully identify potential difficulties with group cohesion and work to enhance cohesion when needed in order to create more positive group climates and enhance your future group interactions.

"Getting Real": Working in Teams

Although most college students hate working in groups, in the "real world" working in teams has become a regular part of professional expectations. Following Japan's lead, corporations in the United States began adopting a more team-based approach for project management decades ago (Jain et al., 2008). This model has become increasingly popular in various organizational settings since then as means to increase productivity and reduce bureaucracy. Teams in the workplace have horizontally expanded the traditional vertical hierarchy of organizations, as the aim of creating these teams was to produce smaller units within an organization that are small enough to be efficient and self-manageable but large enough to create the synergy that we discussed in the earlier part of the chapter.

Aside from efficiency, teams are also valued for the potential for innovation. The strategic pooling of people with diverse knowledge, experience, and skills can lead to synergistic collaborative thinking that produces new knowledge (du Chatenier et al., 2010). This potential for innovation makes teams ideal in high-stakes situations where money, contracts, or lives are at stake. Large corporations are now putting together what has been termed *interorganizational high-performance research and development teams* consisting of highly trained technical and scientific experts from diverse backgrounds to work collectively and simultaneously on complex projects under very challenging conditions (Daniel & Davis, 2009). In markets where companies race to find the next generation of technological improvement, such research and development teams are critical for an organization's success. Research on such teams in real-world contexts has found that in order to be successful, high-performance teams should have a clear base such as a project mission, a leader who strategically assigns various tasks to members based on their specialized expertise, and shared leadership in which individual experts are trusted to make decisions relevant to their purview within the group. Although these high-performance teams are very task oriented, research has also found that the social element cannot be ignored, even under extreme internal and external pressures. In fact, cohesion and interdependence help create a shared reality that in turn improves productivity, because team members feel a sense of shared ownership over their charge (Solansky, 2011).

Some challenges associated with working in teams include the potential for uncertainty or conflict due to the absence of traditional hierarchy, pressures that become overwhelming, lack of shared history since such teams are usually future oriented, and high expectations without resources necessary to complete the task (du Chatenier et al., 2010). To overcome these challenges, team members can think positively but realistically about the team's end goal, exhibit trust in the expertise of other team members, be reliable and approachable to help build a good team spirit, take initiative with actions and ideas, ask critical questions, and provide critical but constructive feedback.

1. Given your career goals, what sorts of teamwork do you think you might engage in?
2. Would you welcome the opportunity to work on a high-performance team? Why or why not?
3. Members of teams are often under intense pressures to produce or perform at high levels. What is the line at which the pressure becomes too much? Ethically, how far should companies push teams and how far should team members go to complete a task?

Socializing Group Members

Group socialization refers to the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors. Group norms, rules, and cohesion can only be created and maintained through socialization (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). It is also through socialization that a shared identity and social reality develops among group members, but this development is dependent on several factors. For example, groups with higher levels of cohesion are more likely to have members that “buy into” rules and norms, which aids in socialization. The need for socialization also changes throughout a group's life span. If membership in a group is stable, long-term members should not need much socialization. However, when new members join a group, existing members must take time to engage in socialization. When a totally new group is formed, socialization will be an ongoing process as group members negotiate rules and procedures, develop norms, and create a shared history over time.

The information exchanged during socialization can be broken down into two general categories: technical and social knowledge (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). Technical knowledge focuses on skills and information needed to complete a task, and social knowledge focuses on behavioral norms that guide interaction. Each type of information is usually conveyed through a combination of formal and informal means. Technical knowledge can be fairly easily passed along through orientations, trainings, manuals, and documents, because this content is often fairly straightforward. Social knowledge is more ambiguous and is usually conveyed through informal means or passively learned by new members through observation. To return to our earlier terminology, technical knowledge relates more to group rules and social knowledge relates more to group norms.

Companies and social organizations socialize new members in different ways. A new training cohort at an established company may be given technical rule-based information in the form of a manual and a history of the organization and an overview of the organizational culture to help convey social knowledge about group norms. Members of some small groups like fraternities or professional organizations have to take pledges or oaths that may convey a mixture of technical and social knowledge. Social knowledge may be conveyed in interactions that are separate from official group time. For example, literally socializing as a group is a good way to socialize group members. Many large and successful businesses encourage small groups within the company to socialize outside of work time in order to build cohesion and group solidarity.

Socialization continues after initial membership through the enforcement of rules and norms. When someone deviates from the rules and norms and is corrected, it serves as a reminder for all other members and performs a follow-up socializing function. Since rules are explicitly stated and documented, deviation from the rules can have consequences ranging from verbal warnings, to temporary or permanent separation from the group, to fines or other sanctions. And although norms are implicit, deviating from them can still have consequences. Even though someone may not actually verbally correct the deviation, the self-consciousness, embarrassment, or awkwardness that can result from such deviations is often enough to initiate corrective actions. Group norms can be so implicit that they are taken for granted and operate under group members' awareness.

Group rules and norms provide members with a sense of predictability that helps reduce uncertainty and increase a sense of security for one's place within the group. They also guide group members' involvement with the group, help create a shared social reality, and allow the group to function in particular ways without having actual people constantly educating, monitoring, and then correcting member behaviors (Hargie, 2011). Of course, the degree to which this is successful depends on the buy-in from group members.

Group Pressures

There must be some kind of motivating force present within groups in order for the rules and norms to help govern and guide a group. Without such pressure, group members would have no incentive to conform to group norms or buy into the group's identity and values. In this section, we will discuss how rules and norms gain their power through internal and external pressures and how these pressures can have positive and negative effects.



Figure 3.8.3.2 Even though group members are different, failure to conform to the group's identity could create problems. Airwolfhound – [Odd one out](#) – CC BY-SA 2.0.

Conformity

In general, some people are more likely to accept norms and rules than others, which can influence the interaction and potential for conflict within a group. While some people may feel a need for social acceptance that leads them to accept a norm or rule with minimal conformity pressure, others may actively resist because they have a valid disagreement or because they have an aggressive or argumentative personality (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Such personality traits are examples of internal pressures that operate within the individual group member and act as a self-governing mechanism. When group members discipline themselves and monitor their own behavior, groups need not invest in as many external mechanisms to promote conformity. Deviating from the group's rules and norms that a member internalized during socialization can lead to self-imposed feelings of guilt or shame that can then initiate corrective behaviors and discourage the member from going against the group.

External pressures in the form of group policies, rewards or punishments, or other forces outside of individual group members also exert conformity pressure. In terms of group policies, groups that have an official admission process may have a probation period during which new members' membership is contingent on them conforming to group expectations. Deviation from expectations during this "trial period" could lead to expulsion from the group. Supervisors, mentors, and other types of group leaders are also agents that can impose external pressures toward conformity. These group members often have the ability to provide positive or negative reinforcement in the form of praise or punishment, which are clear attempts to influence behavior.

Conformity pressure can also stem from external forces when the whole group stands to receive a reward or punishment based on its performance, which ties back to the small group characteristic of interdependence. Although these pressures may seem negative, they also have positive results. Groups that exert an appropriate and ethical amount of conformity pressure typically have higher levels of group cohesion, which as we learned leads to increased satisfaction with group membership, better relationships, and better task performance. Groups with a strong but healthy level of conformity also project a strong group image to those outside the group, which can raise the group's profile or reputation (Hargie, 2011). Pressures toward conformity, of course, can go too far, as is evidenced in tragic stories of people driven to suicide because they felt they couldn't live up to the conformity pressure of their group and people injured or killed enduring hazing rituals that take expectations for group conformity to unethical and criminal extremes.

"Getting Critical": Hazing: Taking Conformity Pressures to the Extreme

Hazing can be defined as actions expected to be performed by aspiring or new members of a group that are irrelevant to the group's activities or mission and are humiliating, degrading, abusive, or dangerous (Richardson, Wang, & Hall, 2012). People who have participated in hazing or have been hazed often note that hazing activities are meant to build group identification and unity. Scholars note that hazing is rationalized because of high conformity pressures and that people who were hazed internalize the group's practices and are more likely to perpetuate hazing, creating a cycle of abuse (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005). Hazing is not new; it has been around in academic and athletic settings since ancient Greece, but it has gotten much attention lately on college campuses as the number of student deaths attributed to hazing behaviors has increased steadily over the past years. In general, it is believed that hazing incidents are underreported, because these activities are done in secret within tightly knit organizations such as fraternities, sororities, and athletic teams that have strong norms of conformity (Richardson, Wang, & Hall, 2012).

The urge to belong is powerful, but where is the line when it comes to the actions people take or what people are willing to endure in order to be accepted? Hazing is meant to have aspiring group members prove their worth or commitment to the group. Examples of hazing include, but aren't limited to, being "kidnapped, transported, and abandoned"; drinking excessively in games or contests; sleep deprivation; engaging in or simulating sexual acts; being physically abused; being required to remain silent; wearing unusual clothes or costumes; or acting in a subservient manner to more senior group members (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005; Cimino, 2011). Research has found that people in leadership roles, who are more likely to have strong group identification, are also more likely to engage in hazing activities (Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005). The same research also found that group members who have supportive friends outside of the organization are more likely to remove themselves from a hazing situation, which points to the fact that people who endure hazing may be doing so out of a strong drive to find the acceptance and belonging they do not have elsewhere.

1. What is your definition of hazing? When does something cross the line from a rite of passage or tradition to hazing?
2. What are some internal and external pressures that might lead to hazing activities?
3. Do some research on hazing incidents on college campuses. What concepts from this chapter do you think could be used in antihazing education campaigns to prevent incidents like the ones you researched?

Groupthink

Groupthink is a negative group phenomenon characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas or courses of action that results from high levels of cohesion and/or high conformity pressures (Janis, 1972). We can better understand groupthink by examining its causes and effects. When group members fall victim to groupthink, the effect is uncritical acceptance of decisions or suggestions for plans of action to accomplish a task or goal. Group meetings that appear to go smoothly with only positive interaction among happy, friendly people may seem ideal, but these actions may be symptomatic of groupthink (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). When people rush to agreement or fear argument, groupthink has a tendency to emerge. Decisions made as a result of groupthink may range from a poorly-thought-out presentation method that bores the audience to a mechanical failure resulting in death.

Two primary causes of groupthink are high levels of cohesion and excessive conformity pressures. When groups exhibit high levels of social cohesion, members may be reluctant to criticize or question another group member's ideas or suggestions for fear that it would damage the relationship. When group members have a high level of task cohesion, they may feel invincible and not critically evaluate ideas. High levels of cohesion may actually lessen conformity pressures since group members who identify strongly with the group's members and mission may not feel a need to question the decisions or suggestions made by others. For those who

aren't blinded by the high levels of cohesion, internal conformity pressures may still lead them to withhold criticism of an idea because the norm is to defer to decisions made by organization leaders or a majority of group members. External conformity pressures because of impending reward or punishment, time pressures, or an aggressive leader are also factors that can lead to groupthink.

To Avoid Groupthink, Groups Should (Hargie, 2011)

- Divvy up responsibilities between group members so decision-making power isn't in the hands of a few
- Track contributions of group members in such a way that each person's input and output is recorded so that it can be discussed
- Encourage and reward the expression of minority or dissenting opinions
- Allow members to submit ideas prior to a discussion so that opinions aren't swayed by members who propose ideas early in a discussion
- Question each major decision regarding its weaknesses and potential negative consequences relative to competing decisions (encourage members to play "devil's advocate")
- Have decisions reviewed by an outside party that wasn't involved in the decision-making process
- Have a "reflection period" after a decision is made and before it is implemented during which group members can express reservations or second thoughts about the decision

Group Conflict

Conflict can appear in indirect or direct forms within group interaction, just as it can in interpersonal interactions. Group members may openly question each other's ideas or express anger toward or dislike for another person. Group members may also indirectly engage in conflict communication through innuendo, joking, or passive-aggressive behavior. Although we often view conflict negatively, conflict can be beneficial for many reasons. When groups get into a rut, lose creativity, or become complacent, conflict can help get a group out of a bad or mediocre routine. Conversely, conflict can lead to lower group productivity due to strain on the task and social dimensions of a group. There are three main types of conflict within groups: procedural, substantive, and interpersonal (Fujishin, 2001). Each of these types of conflict can vary in intensity, which can affect how much the conflict impacts the group and its members.

Procedural Conflict

Procedural conflict emerges from disagreements or trouble with the mechanics of group operations. In this type of conflict, group members differ in their beliefs about *how* something should be done. Procedural conflict can be handled by a group leader, especially if the leader put group procedures into place or has the individual power to change them. If there is no designated leader or the leader doesn't have sole power to change procedures (or just wants input from group members), proposals can be taken from the group on ways to address a procedural conflict to initiate a procedural change. A vote to reach a consensus or majority can also help resolve procedural conflict.



group vote. Pixabay – CC0 Public Domain.

Figure 3.8.3.3 Procedural conflict can often be resolved with a

Substantive Conflict

Substantive conflict focuses on group members' differing beliefs, attitudes, values, or ideas related to the purpose or task of the group. Rather than focusing on questions of *how*, substantive conflicts focus on questions of *what*. Substantive conflicts may emerge as a group tries to determine its purpose or mission. As members figure out how to complete a task or debate which project to start on next, there will undoubtedly be differences of opinion on what something means, what is acceptable in terms of supporting evidence for a proposal, or what is acceptable for a goal or performance standard. Leaders and other group members shouldn't rush to close this type of conflict down. As we learned in our earlier discussion of groupthink, open discussion and debate regarding ideas and suggestions for group action can lead to higher-quality output and may prevent groupthink. Leaders who make final decisions about substantive conflict for the sake of moving on run the risk of creating a win/lose competitive climate in which people feel like their ideas may be shot down, which could lead to less participation. To resolve this type of conflict, group members may want to do research to see what other groups have done in similar situations, as additional information often provides needed context for conflict regarding information and ideas. Once the information is gathered, weigh all proposals and try to discover common ground among perspectives. Civil and open discussions that debate the merits of an idea are more desirable than a climate in which people feel personally judged for their ideas.

Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict emerges from conflict between individual members of the group. Whereas procedural conflict deals with *how* and substantive conflict deals with *what*, interpersonal conflict deals with *who*. Such conflict can be completely irrelevant to the functioning or purpose of the group, perhaps focusing instead on personality differences. Interpersonal conflict can be the result of avoided or improperly handled procedural or substantive conflict that festers and becomes personal rather than task focused. This type of conflict can also result from differences in beliefs, attitudes, and values (when such differences are taken personally rather than substantively); different personalities; or different communication styles. While procedural and substantive conflict may be more easily expressed because they do not directly address a person, interpersonal conflict may slowly build as people avoid openly criticizing or confronting others. Passive-aggressive behavior is a sign that interpersonal conflict may be building under the surface, and other group members may want to intervene to avoid escalation and retaliation. Leaders can also meet with people involved in interpersonal conflict privately to help them engage in perception checking and act as mediators, if needed. While people who initiate procedural or substantive conflict may be perceived by other group members as concerned about the group's welfare and seen as competent in their ability to notice areas on which the group could improve, people who initiate interpersonal conflict are often held in ill-regard by other group members (Ellis & Fisher, 1994).

Primary and Secondary Tensions

Relevant to these types of conflict are primary and secondary tensions that emerge in every group (Bormann & Borman, 1988). When the group first comes together, members experience primary tension, which is tension based on uncertainty that is a natural part of initial interactions. It is only after group members begin to "break the ice" and get to know each other that the tension can be addressed and group members can proceed with the forming stage of group development. Small talk and politeness help group members manage primary tensions, and there is a relatively high threshold for these conflicts because we have all had experiences with such uncertainty when meeting people for the first time and many of us are optimistic that a little time and effort will allow us to get through the tensions. Since some people are more comfortable initiating conversation than others, it's important for more extroverted group members to include less talkative members. Intentionally or unintentionally excluding people during the negotiation of primary tensions can lead to unexpected secondary tensions later on. During this stage people are also less direct in their communication, using more hedges and vague language than they will later in the group process. The indirect communication and small talk that characterize this part of group development aren't a waste of time, as they help manage primary tensions and lay the foundation for future interactions that may involve more substantive conflict.

Secondary tension emerges after groups have passed the forming stage of group development and begin to have conflict over member roles, differing ideas, and personality conflicts. These tensions are typically evidenced by less reserved and less polite behavior than primary tensions. People also have a lower tolerance threshold for secondary tensions, because rather than being an expected part of initial interaction, these conflicts can be more negative and interfere with the group's task performance. Secondary tensions are inevitable and shouldn't be feared or eliminated. It's not the presence or absence of secondary tension that makes a group successful or not; it's how it handles the tensions when they emerge. A certain level of secondary tension is tolerable, not distracting, and can actually enhance group performance and avoid groupthink. When secondary tensions rise above the tolerance threshold and become distracting, they should be released through direct means such as diplomatic confrontation or indirect means such as appropriate humor or taking a break. While primary tensions eventually disappear (at least until a new member arrives),

secondary tensions will come and go and may persist for longer periods of time. For that reason, we will now turn to a discussion of how to manage conflict in group interaction.

Managing Conflict in Small Groups

Some common ways to manage conflict include clear decision-making procedures, third-party mediation, and leader facilitation (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Decision making is discussed in more detail in the chapter titled “Leadership, Roles, and Problem Solving in Groups”, but commonly used methods such as majority vote can help or hurt conflict management efforts. While an up-and-down vote can allow a group to finalize a decision and move on, members whose vote fell on the minority side may feel resentment toward other group members. This can create a win/lose climate that leads to further conflict. Having a leader who makes ultimate decisions can also help move a group toward completion of a task, but conflict may only be pushed to the side and left not fully addressed. Third-party mediation can help move a group past a conflict and may create less feelings of animosity, since the person mediating and perhaps making a decision isn’t a member of the group. In some cases, the leader can act as an internal third-party mediator to help other group members work productively through their conflict.

Tips for Managing Group Conflict (Ellis & Fisher, 1994)

1. Clarify the issue at hand by getting to the historical roots of the problem. Keep in mind that perception leads us to punctuate interactions differently, so it may be useful to know each person’s perspective of when, how, and why the conflict began.
2. Create a positive discussion climate by encouraging and rewarding active listening.
3. Discuss needs rather than solutions. Determine each person’s needs to be met and goals for the outcome of the conflict before offering or acting on potential solutions.
4. Set boundaries for discussion and engage in gatekeeping to prevent unproductive interactions like tangents and personal attacks.
5. Use “we” language to maintain existing group cohesion and identity, and use “I” language to help reduce defensiveness.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Conflict

Remember that a complete lack of conflict in a group is a bad sign, as it indicates either a lack of activity or a lack of commitment on the part of the members (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Conflict, when properly handled, can lead a group to have a better understanding of the issues they face. For example, substantive conflict brings voice to alternative perspectives that may not have been heard otherwise. Additionally, when people view conflict as healthy, necessary, and productive, they can enter into a conflict episode with an open mind and an aim to learn something. This is especially true when those who initiate substantive conflict are able to share and defend their views in a competent and civil manner. Group cohesion can also increase as a result of well-managed conflict. Occasional experiences of tension and unrest followed by resolutions makes groups feel like they have accomplished something, which can lead them to not dread conflict and give them the confidence to more productively deal with it the next time.

Conflict that goes on for too long or is poorly handled can lead to decreased cohesiveness. Group members who try to avoid a conflict can still feel anger or frustration when the conflict drags on. Members who consistently take task-oriented conflict personally and escalate procedural or substantive conflict to interpersonal conflict are especially unpopular with other group members. Mishandled or chronic conflict can eventually lead to the destruction of a group or to a loss in members as people weigh the costs and rewards of membership (Ellis & Fisher, 1994). Hopefully a skilled leader or other group members can take on conflict resolution roles, which we will discuss more in Chapter 14 “Leadership, Roles, and Problem Solving in Groups” in order to prevent these disadvantages of conflict.

Key Takeaways

- *Task cohesion* refers to the degree of commitment of group members to the purpose and activities of the group, and *social cohesion* refers to the degree of attraction and liking among group members. *Group climate* refers to the relatively enduring tone and quality of group interaction that is experienced similarly by group members. The degree of each type of cohesion affects the group’s climate. Groups can be very close socially but not perform well if they do not have an appropriate level of task cohesion. Groups that are too focused on the task can experience interpersonal conflict or a lack of motivation if the social cohesion, which helps enhance the feeling of interdependence, is lacking.
- *Group socialization* refers to the process of teaching and learning the norms, rules, and expectations associated with group interaction and group member behaviors. Group members are socialized by receiving technical and social information. Cohesion plays a role in socialization, as groups that have high levels of task and social cohesion are more likely to buy into the norms of the group. Socialization continues after a member has joined, as members are officially or unofficially rewarded or punished for adhering to or deviating from the group’s norms.

- Conformity pressures are an important force behind group socialization. Internal pressures such as an internal drive to be seen as part of the group or to avoid feeling ashamed or guilty for deviating from the group influence behavior and communication. Likewise, external pressures such as group policies and the potential for reward or punishment also play into group dynamics. The pressures toward conformity can manifest in *groupthink*, which is characterized by a lack of critical evaluation of proposed ideas, a high level of agreement, and a fear of argument.
- Groups experience different kinds of conflict, including procedural, substantive, and interpersonal conflict.
 - Procedural conflict emerges from disagreements or trouble with the mechanics of group operations and deal with questions about “how” a group should do something. A leader may be able to resolve this conflict by changing or explaining a procedure or taking, from group members, proposals for or votes on procedural revisions.
 - Substantive conflict focuses on group members’ differing beliefs, attitudes, values, or ideas related to the purpose or task of the group. Leaders and other group members should avoid closing off this type of conflict before people have had a chance to be heard, as a lack of substantive conflict can lead to groupthink. Instead, listen to all viewpoints, try to find common ground, and then weigh and evaluate the information as a group.
 - Interpersonal conflict emerges from personal conflict between individual members of a group. Manage interpersonal conflict by getting to the root cause of the conflict. In some cases, interpersonal conflict may be disguised as procedural or substantive conflict, or it may develop as a result of poorly managed procedural or substantive conflict. Leaders, group members not directly involved in the conflict, or even outside third parties may also be able to effectively mediate interpersonal conflict.

Exercises

1. Group cohesion and climate are important dynamics within a small group. Identify and then compare and contrast a current or former small group that was cohesive and one that was not cohesive, including a discussion of how the presence or lack of cohesion affected the group’s climate.
2. Groupthink is a negative group dynamic that relates to cohesion and conformity pressures. Several historic events with far-reaching and devastating implications have been analyzed through the lens of groupthink. Choose one of the following examples, and do some Internet research on your own. Then explain how groupthink played a role in the event.
 - The Watergate scandal and cover-up (1972–74)
 - The space shuttle Challenger explosion (1986)
 - The rationale for the invasion of Iraq—specifically the supposed existence of weapons of mass destruction (2001–2)
3. Getting integrated: How might you handle group conflict differently in an academic context versus a professional context? Why? Include a reference to a specific type of conflict discussed in this section and discuss which conflict management strategies discussed in the chapter might be best in each context.

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