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Relating to Others in Groups and Teams

"No member of a crew is praised for the rugged individuality of his rowing."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



CHAPTER OUTLINE

Roles

Norms

Status

Power

Trust

The Development of Group Relationships over Time

Case Study: Practice in Applying Principles Culture

Study Guide: Putting Group Principles into Practice

OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to:

- Describe how an individual develops and defines self-concept.
- Identify the task, maintenance, and individual roles that group members assume.
- Identify several group norms that often develop in small group discussions.
- Describe several effects of status differences on small group communication.
- Describe how five power bases affect relationships in small groups.
- Identify factors that foster trusting relationships with others.
- Describe how relationships develop over time among group members.
- Recognize and adjust to cultural differences in group communication.

Do you consider yourself to be a leader or a follower in small group meetings? Do you usually talk a lot or a little when you serve on a committee? Perhaps your answers depend on the quality of your relationships with others in the group.

Relationships are the ongoing connections you make with other people. In groups and teams, relationships are the feelings, roles, norms, status, and trust that both affect and reflect the quality of communication between you and others. Have you served on a committee with three or four other people who you felt were much better qualified than you? Your feeling of inferiority undoubtedly affected your relationship with the other group members. In small groups, and in other communication contexts as well, the quality of interpersonal relationships often determines what people say to one another.

Communication scholar Joann Keyton notes that relational communication in groups refers to the verbal and nonverbal messages that create the social fabric of a group by promoting relationships between and among group members. It is the affective or expressive dimension of group communication as opposed to the instrumental, or task-oriented dimension.¹

Relational communication theorists assert that every message people communicate to one another has both a content dimension and a relationship dimension. The content dimension of a message includes the specific information conveyed to someone. The relationship dimension involves message cues that provide hints about whether you like or dislike the person with whom you are communicating. Whether you give a public speech, talk with your spouse, or communicate with another member of a small group, you provide information about the feelings you have toward your listener as well as about ideas and thoughts.

This chapter will emphasize the relational elements that affect the quality of the relationships you establish with other group members. Specifically, it will concentrate on variables that have an important effect on the relationships you establish with others in small groups: (1) the roles you assume, (2) the norms or standards the group develops, (3) the status differences that affect the group's productivity, (4) the power some members wield, (5) the trust that improves group performance, and (6) the effects of cultural differences.

Roles

Stop reading this chapter for just a moment, and reflect on the question “Who are you?” Now, write down ten different responses.

Who Are You?

1. *I am* _____
2. *I am* _____
3. *I am* _____
4. *I am* _____
5. *I am* _____
6. *I am* _____
7. *I am* _____
8. *I am* _____
9. *I am* _____
10. *I am* _____

As you relate to others in small groups, your concept of self—who you think you are—affects your communication and relationships with them. Your self-concept also has an impact on how others relate to you.

In trying to reduce the uncertainty that occurs when communicating in groups, people quickly assess the behaviors of others. They assign roles—sets of expectations—to others. In a small group, roles result from (1) people's expectations about their own behavior—their *self-concepts*, (2) the perceptions others have about individuals' positions in the group, and (3) people's actual behavior as they interact with others. Because their self-concepts largely determine the roles people assume in small groups, it is important to understand how self-concepts develop—how people come to learn who they think they are.

Self-Concept Development: Gender, Sexual Orientation, Culture, and Role

How do you know who you are? Why did you respond as you did when you were asked to consider the question “Who are you?” A number of factors influence your self-concept. First, other people influence who you think you are. Your parents gave you your name. Perhaps a teacher once told you that you were good in art, and consequently you think of yourself as artistic. Maybe somebody once told you that you cannot sing very well. Because you believed that person, you may now view yourself as not being very musically inclined. Thus, you listen to others, especially those whose opinions you respect, to help shape your self-concept.

One important part of everyone's self-concept is *gender*.² Whether you experience life as male or female affects your communication with others. While it is natural to assume that people's communication differs depending on their biological sex, recent research suggests that the psychological aspects of gender—how “feminine” or “masculine” a person is—may be at least as important a variable.³ Research supports gender differences that “characterize women as using communication to connect with, support, and achieve closeness with others, and men as using communication to accomplish some task and to assert their individuality.”⁴ Sexual orientation may also affect a person's sense of self-concept, as well as how he or she relates to others.

Whether you approve or disapprove of another person's sexual orientation should not reduce your effectiveness when communicating in groups and teams. You already know that it is inappropriate to use racially charged terms that demean a person's race or ethnicity; it is equally important not to use derogatory terms or make jokes about a person's sexual orientation. Being sensitive to attitudes about sexual orientation is part of the role of an effective group communicator.

Another important component of self-concept is *culture of origin*. Different cultures foster different beliefs and attitudes about communication, status, nonverbal behavior, and all the interpersonal dynamics discussed throughout this book. The development of selfhood takes place differently from culture to culture. For example, Japanese and North American social lives flow from different premises. Many North Americans prize the image of the "rugged individualist"; many Japanese, in contrast, view this image as suggestive of egotism and insensitivity. For some Japanese, the line where self ends and others begin is far less clearly defined than it is for many North Americans.

Culture influences self-concept and thus such behaviors as the willingness to communicate in a group.⁵ There is ample evidence that individuals from different cultures interpret situations and concepts very differently.⁶ Therefore, understanding cultural differences is essential to understanding behavior in small groups.

The various groups with which one affiliates also help to define one's self-concept. If you attend college, you may describe yourself as a student. If you are a member of a fraternity or sorority, you may consider that association to set you apart from others. Your religious affiliation, your political party, and your membership in civic and social organizations all contribute to the way you perceive yourself.

You also learn who you are by simply observing and interpreting your own behavior. Just as before leaving your dorm or apartment you may look in the mirror to see how you look, so too do you try to see yourself as others will see you. You mentally watch your own behavior, almost as if you were looking at someone else, evaluating what you see and forming an impression of who you are. Of course, as both the observer and the observed, your impressions are subject to bias. You may be too critical of yourself. Your high expectations for your own behavior, when compared with your perceptions of your actions, may give you a distorted view.

Diversity of Roles in Small Groups

As a member of a small group, you bring your own perceptions and expectations, which are based on your experiences with other people. Your expectations thus provide a foundation for the roles you will assume in a group. Yet your role is also worked out between you and the other group members.⁷ As you interact with others, they form impressions of you and your abilities. As they reward you for your actions in the group, you learn what abilities and behaviors they will reinforce. These abilities and behaviors may, in turn, become part of your self-concept.

People assume roles because of their interests and abilities and because of the needs and expectations of the rest of the group. Some roles, especially in teams, are formally assigned. When police officers arrive on the scene of an accident, bystanders do not generally question their assumption of leadership. In a task-oriented small group, a member may be assigned the role of secretary, which includes specific duties and responsibilities. A chairperson may be elected to coordinate the meeting and delegate responsibilities. Assigning responsibilities and specific roles reduces uncertainty. A group can sometimes get on with its task more efficiently if some roles are assigned. Of course, even if a person has

been elected or assigned the role of chairperson, the group may reject his or her leadership in favor of that of another member who may better meet the needs of the group. In other words, roles can be assigned *formally* or can evolve *informally*.⁸ To be most successful, groups and teams require a balance of team roles. When a balance of roles exists within a team, the team will likely be successful.⁹

The kinds of roles discussed so far are **task roles**—they help accomplish a group's task. There are also two other kinds of roles. **Maintenance roles** define a group's social atmosphere. A member who tries to maintain a peaceful, harmonious group climate by mediating disagreements and resolving conflicts performs a maintenance function. **Individual roles** call attention to individual contributions and tend to be counterproductive to the overall group effort. Someone who is more interested in seeking personal recognition than in promoting the general benefit of the group is adopting an individual role.

Kenneth Benne and Paul Sheats have compiled a comprehensive list of possible informal roles that individual group members can assume.¹⁰ Perhaps you can identify the various roles you have assumed while participating in small group discussions.

Group Task Roles

Initiator-contributor	Proposes new ideas or approaches to group problem solving; may suggest a different procedure or approach to organizing the problem-solving task
Information seeker	Asks for clarification of suggestions; also asks for facts or other information that may help the group deal with the issues at hand
Opinion seeker	Asks for a clarification of the values and opinions expressed by other group members
Information giver	Provides facts, examples, statistics, and other evidence that pertains to the problem the group is attempting to solve
Opinion giver	Offers beliefs or opinions about the ideas under discussion
Elaborator	Provides examples based on his or her experience or the experience of others that help to show how an idea or suggestion would work if the group accepted a particular course of action
Coordinator	Tries to clarify and note relationships among the ideas and suggestions that have been provided by others
Orienter	Attempts to summarize what has occurred and tries to keep the group focused on the task at hand
Evaluator-critic	Makes an effort to judge the evidence and conclusions that the group suggests
Energizer	Tries to spur the group to action and attempts to motivate and stimulate the group to greater productivity
Procedural technician	Helps the group achieve its goal by performing tasks such as distributing papers, rearranging the seating, or running errands for the group
Recorder	Writes down suggestions and ideas of others; makes a record of the group's progress

Group-Building and Maintenance Roles

Encourager	Offers praise, understanding, and acceptance of others' ideas and suggestions
Harmonizer	Mediates disagreements among group members
Compromiser	Attempts to resolve conflicts by trying to find an acceptable solution to disagreements among group members
Gatekeeper and expediter	Encourages less talkative group members to participate and tries to limit lengthy contributions of other group members
Standard setter	Helps to set standards and goals for the group
Group observer	Keeps records of the group's process and uses the information that is gathered to evaluate the group's procedures
Follower	Basically goes along with the suggestions and ideas of other group members; serves as an audience in group discussions and decision making

Individual Roles

Aggressor	Destroys or deflates the status of other group members; may try to take credit for someone else's contribution
Blocker	Is generally negative, stubborn, and disagreeable without apparent reason
Recognition seeker	Seeks the spotlight by boasting and reporting on his or her personal achievements
Self-confessor	Uses the group as an audience to report personal feelings, insights, and observations
Joker	Reflects a lack of involvement in the group's process by telling stories and jokes that do not help the group; lack of interest may result in cynicism, nonchalance, or other behaviors that indicate lack of enthusiasm for the group and a focus on himself or herself
Dominator	Makes an effort to assert authority by manipulating group members or attempting to take over the entire group; may use flattery or assertive behavior to dominate the discussion
Help seeker	Tries to evoke a sympathetic response from others; often expresses insecurity or feelings of low self-worth
Special-interest pleader	Works to serve an individual need; speaks for a special group or organization that best fits his or her own biases

In looking at the preceding list of roles, you may have recognized yourself—for instance, as a harmonizer or a follower—and said, “Yes, that’s me. That’s the role I usually take.” You may also have tried to classify other members of some group into these categories. Although identifying the characteristics of roles may help you understand their nature and function

Both group task roles and group-building and maintenance roles are important to a group's success. What roles do you usually take in a group?



in small group communication, stereotyping individuals can lock them into roles. Ernest Bormann has extensively studied role behavior in groups and notes that, when asked to analyze group roles, group members often categorize and label other members, based on the roles they are perceived to fill.¹¹ As you identify the roles adopted by group members, be flexible in your classifications. Realize that you and other members can assume several roles during a group discussion. In fact, a group member rarely serves only as an “encourager,” “opinion seeker,” or “follower.” Roles are dynamic; they change as perceptions, experiences, and expectations change. An individual can assume leadership responsibilities at one meeting and play a supporting role at the next.

Because a role is worked out jointly between you and the group, you will no doubt find yourself assuming different roles in different groups. Perhaps a committee you belong to needs someone to serve as a procedural leader to keep the meeting in order. Because you recognize this need and no one else keeps the group organized, you may find yourself steering the group back on to the topic, making sure all members have a chance to participate. In another committee, where others serve as procedural leaders, you may be the person who generates new ideas. Whether consciously or not, you develop a role unique to your talents and the needs of the group. Your role, then, changes from group to group.

Roles in groups and teams can be either *informal*, as we've discussed, or *formal*. In the case of teams, roles are likely to be more formally defined. For example, one team member may have primary responsibility for communicating with the supervisor or with other teams and departments. Another may head up project planning. When roles within a team are formally established, it is important that these roles be clearly defined and coordinated with one another.¹²

If you understand how group roles form and how various roles function, you will be better able to help a group achieve its purpose. Studies of asynchronous college discussion groups have found significant improvement in their performance when roles such as moderator, starter, and summarizer are assigned.¹³ Groups need members to perform both maintenance and task functions. Task functions help the group get the job done, and maintenance functions help the group run smoothly. If no one is performing maintenance functions, you could point this out to the group, or assume some responsibility for them.

If you notice individuals hindering the group's progress because they have adopted individual roles (blocker, aggressor, recognition seeker, etc.), you could bring this to the attention of the offending group member. Explain that individual roles can make the group less efficient and can lead to conflict among members. Although you cannot assume complete responsibility for distributing roles within your group, your insights can help solve some of the group's potential problems. Understanding group roles—and when to use them—is an important part of becoming a competent group communicator.

Norms

You have undoubtedly seen a movie or television show about the Old West in which townspeople feared villains who had no respect for the law. According to the way movies depict history, people such as Wyatt Earp were among the first to enforce the law and restore peace and order. As in the Old West, in groups and teams standards of acceptable behavior are necessary to keep peace and order. Although a small group or team does not need a Wyatt Earp to enforce order, it probably does need certain norms to help its members feel comfortable with their roles and their relationships.

Identifying Group Norms

Norms are rules or standards that determine what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in a group. They establish expectations of how group members should behave. Norms reduce some of the uncertainty that occurs when people congregate. People's speech, the clothes they wear, or do not wear, and how and where they sit are all influenced group norms. Group norms also affect group-member relationships and the quality of group decisions.¹⁴

Norms are neither good nor bad. It is even possible for the same norm to be beneficial to one group but harmful to another. For example, a norm of permitting side conversations between two people within a group can be helpful in problem-solving groups where faction forming and debate are desirable. But the same behavior can impede a group in negotiation tasks where group unity is more desirable.¹⁵

If you recently joined a group, how do you know what the group's norms are? One way to identify norms is to observe any repeated behavior patterns. Note, for example, any consistencies in the way people talk or dress. In identifying normative behavior in a group, consider the following questions:

- How do group members dress?
- What are group members' attitudes toward time? (Do group meetings begin and end on time? Are members often late to meetings?)
- What type of language is used by most group members? (Is swearing acceptable? Is the language formal?)
- Do group members use humor to relieve tension?
- Do group members address the group leader formally?
- Is it proper to address group members by their first names?

Answering these questions will help you identify a group's norms. Some groups even develop norms for developing norms. For example, members may discuss the type of clothing that will be worn to meetings or talk about how tardiness or absenteeism should be handled.

Noting when someone breaks a rule can also reveal group norms. If a member arrives late and other members frown or grimace at that person, they probably do not approve of

the violation of the norm. If, after a member uses obscene words, another member says, "I wish you wouldn't use words like that," you can be certain that for at least one person a norm has been broken. Thus, punishment indicates violated norms. Often the severity of the punishment corresponds to the significance of the norm.¹⁶ Punishment can range from subtle nonverbal expressions of disapproval (which may not even be noticed by the person expressing them) to death—the hangman's noose was commonly the ultimate punishment for those who violated the norms or laws of the Old West.

How Do Norms Develop?

Have you noticed that in some classes it is okay to say something without raising your hand, but in others the instructor must call on you before you speak? Raising your hand is a norm. How did different norms develop in two similar situations? There are at least two key reasons: (1) People develop norms in new groups based on those of previous groups they have belonged to, and (2) norms develop based on what happens early in a group's existence.

Marshall Scott Poole suggests that a group organizes itself based, in part, on norms that members encountered in previous groups.¹⁷ As we noted in Chapter 2, Giddens and Poole call this process *structuration*. Groups do things (become structured) based on the ways those things were done in other groups. If many of your classmates previously had classes in which they had to raise their hands before speaking, then they will probably introduce that

THEORY INTO PRACTICE



Establishing Group Norms

Norms are the rules or standards that tell us what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in a group. Structuration theory tells us that groups are structured by members' use of the rules and resources they bring with them into the group. A group's norms, then, are established, in part, by members' previous experiences. Group members interact with one another to establish new group norms.

Real-Life Applications

You can leave the development of group norms to chance and relatively random group interaction, or you can approach the establishment of group norms intentionally. Often, spending some time to establish norms when a group is first formed can save time and conflict later on. Just as establishing mutuality of concern

among group members is important, as we suggested in Chapter 3, so too is consciously setting some ground rules.

You might suggest discussing the ground rules for the group along with the usual discussions about how frequently and where you'll meet. What is acceptable and unacceptable behavior? Is it OK to show up late to a meeting or to miss one altogether? What will happen if you do? If you have to miss a meeting, how will you let the others know? What provisions will the group establish for bringing a member who has missed a meeting up to date?

In the long run, a clear mutual understanding of a group's norms frees group members to focus their attention on the actual work of the group. Your own reflections on your experience with group norms and your leadership in helping the groups you are part of adopt norms that facilitate their work can be important resources that you provide your groups.

behavior into other groups. If enough people accept it, a norm is born—or, more accurately, a norm is reborn.

Norms also develop from the kinds of behavior that occur early in a group's development. Because of member uncertainty about how to behave when a group first meets, members are eager to learn acceptable behavior. If, for example, on the first day of class, a student raises his or her hand to respond to the instructor, and another student does the same, that norm is likely to stick. However, if several students respond without raising a hand, chances are that raising hands will not become a norm in the class.

Conforming to Group Norms

What influences how quickly and rigidly people conform to the rules and standards of a group? According to Harold Reitan and Marvin Shaw, at least five factors affect conformity to group norms.¹⁸

1. *The individual characteristics of the group members:* In summarizing the research on conformity, Shaw makes the following observation:

More intelligent persons are less likely to conform than less intelligent persons; women usually conform more than men, at least on traditional tasks; there is a curvilinear relationship between age and conformity; persons who generally blame themselves for what happens to them conform more than those low on self-blame; and authoritarians conform more than nonauthoritarians.¹⁹

Thus, group members' past experiences and unique personality characteristics influence how they conform to established norms.

2. *The clarity of the norm and the certainty of punishment for breaking it:* The more ambiguous a group norm, the less likely it is that members will conform to it. The military spells out behavior rules clearly so that little if any ambiguity remains. A new recruit is drilled on how to talk, march, salute, and eat. Failure to abide by the rules results in swift and sure corrective sanctions. Thus, the recruit quickly learns to conform. In small groups, as soon as rules become clear and norms are established, members will usually conform.
3. *The number of people who have already conformed to the norm:* Imagine walking into a room with five or six other people, as participants once did in a study by Solomon Asch. Three lines have been drawn on a blackboard. One line is clearly shorter than the other two. One by one, each person is asked which line is shortest, and each says that all the lines are the same length. Finally, it is your turn to judge which of the lines is shortest. You are perplexed because your eyes tell you that one line is definitely shorter. Yet can all the other members of your group be wrong? You answer that all of the lines are the same length—you conform. You do not want to appear odd to the other group members. Factors such as the size of a group, the number of people who agree with a certain policy, and the status of those who conform contribute to the pressure for conformity in a group.²⁰
4. *The quality of the interpersonal relationships that have developed in the group:* A group whose members like one another and respect one another's opinions is more likely to support conformity than is a less cohesive group. Employees who like their jobs, bosses, and coworkers and take pride in their work are more likely to support group norms than those who have negative or frustrating relationships with their employers or colleagues.



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5. *The sense of group identification that members have developed:* If group members can readily identify with the goals of the group, they are more likely to conform to standards of behavior. For example, church members who support the doctrine of a church are probably going to conform to the wishes of those in leadership positions. In addition, group members who feel they will be a part of a group for some time are more likely to conform to group norms.

Conforming to group norms requires participants to be aware of both *general norms* and more specific *operationalized norms*. Groups often adopt general norms very quickly. For example, "We all need to communicate with one another frequently" would be a common general group norm. But while there may be clear consensus

around this general norm, it may mean different things to different people. For one person, *frequently* might mean "weekly," whereas another team member may be thinking in "daily" terms. Thus, norms tend to evolve from the general to the operational (what the norms mean in terms of actual behaviors) over time as the specifics are negotiated. As always, communication about norms is key.²¹

Although violating a group norm usually results in group disapproval and perhaps chastisement, such a violation can occasionally benefit a group. Just because members conform unanimously to a rule does not mean that the rule is beneficial. For example, in some situations the opinion of group members may matter more to decision making than the facts they exchange.²² When most group members, especially those of higher status, are in agreement, it is tempting for other group members to disregard contradictory evidence or facts and to go along with the majority. Such disregard for facts and evidence can lead to unfortunate consequences, as we'll discuss in Chapter 8 when we consider groupthink.

COLLABORATING ETHICALLY



What Would You Do?

Relational communication is the process of building relationships between and among group members. But what happens when you see another group member behaving unethically?

Suppose that in the final semester of your senior year, you and a classmate are student interns for a not-for-profit organization that raises funds and develops programs to help

children who have suffered abuse. Each of you receives a small stipend for your work on the organization's programming team, as well as three college credits (assuming successful completion of the internship and a favorable review by your supervisors).

It has come to your attention that your friend has been taking office supplies for personal use. At first it was small packages of sticky notes, but now your friend has gone home with 500 sheets of printer paper, an ink cartridge, several rolls of cellophane tape, a tape dispenser, and a stapler.

What would you do?

Establishing Ground Rules and a Mission Statement

Norms often develop in a group without anyone's explicitly identifying what is or is not acceptable behavior. A group or team may decide to develop more precise rules to help accomplish its task. According to communication researcher Susan Shimanoff, a rule is "a followable prescription that indicates what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts."²³ Group or team **ground rules** are explicit, agreed-on prescriptions for acceptable and appropriate behavior. Undoubtedly your school has rules about what constitutes appropriate behavior: Don't cheat on a test, plagiarize a paper, carry a gun to campus, or consume alcohol in class—these are typical college and university rules. Rules help keep order so that meaningful work can be accomplished. Rules also state what the group or organization values. Honesty, fairness, freedom of speech, and personal safety are typical values embedded in rules.

Because teams are usually more structured and coordinated than a typical group discussion, most training sessions that teach people how to become an effective team stress that a high-performing team needs clear ground rules.²⁴

How does a team develop ground rules? The team leader may facilitate a discussion to establish the ground rules. If a group has no designated leader, any team member can say, "To help us stay organized and get our work done, let's establish some ground rules." Groups and teams operate better if members develop their own ground rules rather than having them imposed from "on high" or from the leader.

To help your group or team develop ground rules, consider the following questions:

- How long should our meetings last?
- Should we have a standard meeting place and time?
- What should a member do if he or she can't attend a meeting?
- How will we follow up to ensure that each member is doing his or her assigned work?
- Who is going to organize the agenda for our meetings?
- How will we manage conflict?
- How will we make our decisions—by majority vote or consensus?
- What kind of climate do we want in our meetings?
- What other kinds of guidelines do we need to develop?

Typical team ground rules include:

- Everyone will attend all meetings.
- Meetings will start on time.
- Each team member will follow through on individual assignments.
- Each team member will be prepared for every meeting.
- We will make decisions by consensus rather than majority vote.
- We will work together to manage conflict when it arises.

Another component related to team ground rules that is usually taught in team training is that each team should develop a mission statement. A team **mission statement** is a concise description of the goals or desired outcomes of the team. A mission statement not only helps you to accomplish your task but also lets you know when you've completed your task. Your work is finished when you've accomplished your mission. As author Stephen Covey suggests, begin with the end in mind.²⁵ A well-worded team mission statement should be (1) specific—it should be brief and clearly describe what the team should accomplish; (2) measurable—the team must be able to determine whether the mission was achieved; (3) attainable—the mission should be realistic; (4) relevant—whatever the mission, it should

be appropriate to the larger organization and the overall purpose of the team; (5) time bound—the team should set a deadline or time frame for achieving the mission; and (6) a bit of a challenge, so as to stretch the team—if the mission is too simple, it won't inspire the team to do its best work. As we noted in Chapter 1, a team should have a “clear and elevating goal.” A good team mission statement should pass the SMARTS test—it should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time bound, and should Stretch the team.²⁶

Often teams are given their marching orders by someone from outside the group. Even when the team is given its goal, sometimes called a **charge**—the purpose of the team, group, or committee—the team should take some time to discuss the mission so that each person clearly understands and agrees to it. Also, discuss whether it passes the SMARTS test.

REVIEW

► CONFORMITY TO GROUP NORMS DEPENDS ON

- The individual characteristics of group members
- The clarity of the norm and the certainty of punishment for breaking it
- The number of people who already conform to the norm
- The quality of interpersonal relationships in the group
- The sense of group identification that members have developed

Status

“My dad can run faster than your dad.”

“Oh, yeah? Well, my dad is smarter than your dad.”

“No, he's not!”

“Oh, yes he is!”

“Says who?”

“Says me. Wanna make something of it?”

Children, as well as adults, are concerned about status—who is better, brighter, and more beautiful. **Status** is an individual's importance. People with higher social status generally have more prestige and command more respect than do people of lower status. People want to talk to and talk about, see and be seen with those of high status.

Privileges Accorded to High-Status Group Members

Most people like to be perceived as enjoying some status within a group. Because occupying a position of status fulfills a need for attention, it also builds self-respect and self-esteem. Bormann explains why high-status positions are pleasant:

The group makes a high-status person feel important and influential. They show him deference, listen to him, ask his advice, and often reward him with a greater share of the group's goods. He gets a bigger office, more secretaries, better furniture, more salary, a bigger car, and so forth. Even in communication-class discussion groups, the

high-status members receive considerable gratification of their social and esteem needs. One of the most powerful forces drawing people into groups is the attraction of high status.²⁷

Perhaps you have participated in small groups in which the status of an individual afforded him or her certain privileges that were not available to the rest of the group. The chairperson of the board may have a private dining room or an executive washroom, while other members must eat in the company cafeteria and use public washrooms.

Effects of Status Differences

In groups and teams, members' status exerts a significant effect on interpersonal relationships. Status affects who talks to whom and how often a member speaks. The status or reputation an individual has before joining a group certainly affects the role he or she assumes. In addition, norms that help groups determine how they will deal with status differences and what privileges they should allow those with greater prestige develop quickly. Several researchers have observed how status differences affect the relationships among members of a small group. Consider the following research conclusions:

- High-status group members talk more than low-status members.²⁸
- High-status group members communicate more with other high-status members than they do with those of lower status.²⁹
- Low-status group members tend to direct their conversation to high-status group members rather than to those of lower or equal status.³⁰
- Low-status group members communicate more positive messages to high-status members than they do to those of equal or lower status.³¹
- High perceived status and expertise increase a group member's tendencies to participate actively and to generate positive self-evaluations of his or her own input into the group's task.³²
- High-status group members usually abide by the norms of the group more than do low-status group members. (The exception to this research finding occurs when high-status members realize that they can violate group norms and receive less punishment than low-status group members would receive; thus, depending on the situation, they may violate certain group norms.)³³
- Group members are more likely to ignore the comments and suggestions made by low-status members than those made by high-status members.³⁴
- Low-status group members communicate more irrelevant information than do high-status members.³⁵
- High-status members are less likely than low-status members to complain about their jobs or their responsibilities.³⁶
- Communication with high-status group members can replace the need for the upward movement of low-status members in the group's status hierarchy.³⁷
- High-status group members tend to talk to the entire group more than members of lower status do.³⁸
- The leader of a small group is usually the member with the highest status. (The exception to this conclusion occurs when the leader emerges because of capability and competence and not necessarily because of popularity. That kind of leader holds a lower status than does a more popular and well-liked group member.)³⁹
- What's your status level? Research shows that your perception of your own status in a group closely approximates others' views of you.⁴⁰

REVIEW

► EFFECTS OF STATUS DIFFERENCES IN GROUPS

Group members with high status

- Talk more
- Communicate more often with other high-status members
- Have more influence
- Generally abide by group norms
- Are less likely to be ignored
- Are less likely to complain about their responsibilities
- Talk to the entire group
- Are likely to serve in leadership roles

Group members with low status

- Direct conversation to high-status rather than low-status members
- Communicate more positive messages to high-status members
- Are more likely to have their comments ignored
- Communicate more irrelevant information
- Talk to high-status members as a substitute for climbing the social hierarchy in the group

Observing Status Differences to Predict Group Dynamics

Knowing how status affects the relationships among group members helps you predict who will talk with whom. If you can perceive status differences, you can also predict the type of messages communicated in a small group discussion. These research conclusions suggest that the social hierarchy of a group affects group cohesiveness, group satisfaction, and even the quality of a group's solution. One of the benefits of increased status within a group is the relative increase in the group member's influence or power.

Power

Sociologist Robert Bierstedt once observed that in the “entire lexicon of sociological concepts, none is more troublesome than the concept of *power*. We may say about it in general only what St. Augustine said about time, that we all know perfectly well what it is—until someone asks us.”⁴¹ Although scholars debate definitions of power as well as its relationship to other variables such as status and authority, they generally agree that **power**, at its core, involves the ability of one person to control or influence some other person or decision.⁴² Power in a small group, then, is reflected in an individual's ability to get other members to conform to his or her wishes. Power is about influence.

Certain group members may have more power in the group than others. Sometimes the sources of their power are clear to members, such as in groups with large status differences; but in other cases, the sources of power are not so clear. In order to map out the territory of social power in small groups, you need to look at power bases and the effects of power on group processes.

Power Bases

Your power base in a group is the sum of the resources that you can use to control or influence others. Because no two group members have exactly the same resources, each member operates from a different power base. What are some of these power bases? John French

VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION



Technology development is not neutral but reflects the values of the cultures in which it develops. In 2000, a team of researchers at the University of California at Santa Barbara analyzed the structure of the Internet to determine the social impact of that technology. They found that the primary use (70 percent) of the Internet was information dissemination and gathering. Its decentralized structure makes government regulation of the medium extremely difficult and encourages open communication. According to the authors, these democratic values implicit in the technology reflect a North American cultural influence that will most certainly drive the future development of the Internet.

These democratic values may also reflect the fact that communication on a computer screen minimizes status differences that are far more influential in face-to-face situations. Students and faculty members who use online chat rooms or threaded discussions in their classes report an interesting finding that supports this notion. Those who participate most actively in online discussions are often not the same students who participate most actively in face-to-face classroom discussions. Some students are simply more comfortable in an environment where they can choose their words more carefully and less publicly; it suits their

personalities better. As you add virtual group communication to your group communication repertoire, keep in mind these tips:

- Online discussions may seem more democratic because of the factors noted above. However, status differences don't disappear when we no longer can see the other person. Remember to adapt your messages to your audience—friend, peer, colleague, professor, supervisor, CEO—as appropriate.
- The disembodied messages of virtual communication can be easily misinterpreted without attending nonverbal signals. Be sure you understand the sender's meaning before you react.
- Resist the tendency to communicate solely online in lieu of face to face. Convenience and effectiveness are often competing values.

Educators know that active engagement in the learning process and time on task are the best predictors of student academic success. It follows, then, that given the different personalities of group members and the democratic value of participation, a combination of face-to-face interaction and virtual communication may reduce the effects of status differences, maximize the contributions of each group member, and consequently maximize the effectiveness of your group.

For more information, see Andrew Flanigan and Wendy Jo Mayard Farinola, "The Technical Code of the Internet/World Wide Web," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 17 (2000): 409–28. Also see Merlyna Lim and Mark E. Kann, "Democratic Deliberation and Mobilization on the Internet," *Networked Publics—Annenberg Center for Communication* (2005–2006). http://netpublics.annenberg.edu/about_netpublics/democratic_deliberation_and_mobilization_on_the_internet.

and Bertram Raven identified five power bases in their study of small groups: (1) legitimate power, (2) referent power, (3) expert power, (4) reward power, and (5) coercive power.⁴³

Legitimate power stems from a group member's ability to influence others because of being elected, appointed, or selected to exert control over a group. Legitimate power comes from occupying a position of responsibility. The principal of a school has the legitimate power to control school policy; the senators from your state have legitimate power to represent their constituents. Many of the privileges enjoyed by high-status group members reflect

this kind of power base. A small group member who has been elected chairperson is given legitimate power to influence the group's procedures.

Referent power is the power of interpersonal attraction. Recall from Chapter 3 that people are attracted to others whom they admire and want to emulate. Put simply, people we like have more power over us than those people we do not like.

Expert power stems from a group member's ability to influence others based on the knowledge and information the member possesses. As the saying goes, knowledge is power. Suppose you are a member of a group studying ways to improve the environment of the river in your community. If one of your group members has a Ph.D. in aquatic plant life, that person's knowledge and access to information give him or her expert power. More than likely, that person can influence the group. However, just because a group member has knowledge does not mean that he or she will exert more influence in the group. The group must find the knowledge credible and useful.

Reward power is based on a person's ability to reward behaviors. If you are in a position to help another member gain money, status, power, acceptance, or other rewards, you will have power over that person. Of course, group members are motivated by different needs and goals. What is rewarding to one may not be rewarding to others. Reward power is effective only if a person finds the reward satisfying or valuable. Others must also believe that a person actually has the power and resources to bestow the reward.

Coercive power, the negative side of reward power, is based on the perception that another can punish you for acting or not acting in a certain way. The ability to demote others, reduce their salaries or benefits, force them to work overtime hours, or fire them are examples of resources that can make up this power base. Even though coercive power may achieve a desired effect, group members usually resent threats of punishment intended to make them conform. Punished group members often try to dominate in other interactions or escape from heavy-handed efforts to accomplish a group goal.

Effects of Power on Group Process

Members who have power influence the group process. Whether their influence will be positive or negative depends on how wisely the members use their influence. The following principles summarize the impact of power on group deliberations:

- A struggle for power among group members can result in poor group decisions and less group cohesion.
- Members who overtly seek dominance and control over a group often focus attention on themselves rather than on achieving group goals. They typically serve as aggressors, blockers, recognition seekers, dominators, or special-interest pleaders (roles discussed earlier in this chapter).
- Group members with little power often talk less frequently in a group.
- Charles Berger observed that "persons who talk most frequently and for the longest periods of time are assumed to be the most dominant group members. In addition, persons receiving the most communication are assumed to be most powerful."⁴⁴ While not all powerful members dominate group conversations, there is a relationship between verbal contributions to the group and influence. The exceptions to this principle are members who talk so frequently that they are ignored by the group. Cultural variations can influence this dynamic as well.
- Group members can lose power if other members think they use power for personal gain or to keep a group from achieving its goals.

A person's power base in a group is the sum of the resources that person can use to control or influence others. What types of power do you think Donald Trump exercises over his employees?



- Group members usually expect individuals with greater power to have high-status privileges. However, if members believe that powerful members are having a detrimental effect on the group, their credibility and influence are likely to diminish. Too many perks and privileges given to some members sap a group's ability to do its job and can result in challenges to the influential group members.
- Too much power in one individual can lead to less group decision making and more autocratic decision making. Autocratic decision making occurs when one person with several power bases (for example, one who can reward and punish, has needed information, is well liked, and has been appointed to lead) makes a decision alone rather than with the group as a whole. Group members may not speak their minds for fear of reprisals.

- Increasing your level of activity in a group can increase your power and influence.
- Groups with equal power distribution show higher quality group communication than do groups with unequal power distribution.⁴⁵
- In corporate work teams, individual power is related to the fact that group members must depend on each other.⁴⁶

If you participate in a group and sense that your influence is diminishing, try to participate more and to take an active role in helping the group achieve its goal. Volunteering to help with tasks and increasing your knowledge about group problems, issues, or decisions can also enhance your influence. If you see other group members losing influence, you can give them (or suggest that they take responsibility for) specific tasks that will bring them back into the group's mainstream (assuming that they are willing to accept the responsibility).

REVIEW

► POWER BASES

Types of Power and Sources of Influence

- Legitimate: Being elected, appointed, or selected to lead the group
- Reference: Being well liked
- Expert: A member's knowledge and information
- Reward: The ability to provide rewards for desired behavior
- Coercive: The ability to punish others

Power and Gender

Stereotypes portray women as being more easily influenced than men and as having less power over others than their male counterparts. However, although results are mixed, research tends to dispel these illusions.⁴⁷ In one study, when women were placed in positions of power, they were just as likely as men to use strategies associated with power. Because men typically occupy roles of higher power in society, the opportunity for them to use power strategies is greater than for women. This observation led the researcher to conclude that the unequal distribution of power results in the illusion of gender differences, which are really the result of women's and men's relative social status. Thus, apparent gender differences must be understood within a context of status and power.⁴⁸

Clearly there are inequities in the workplace. But social and organizational expectations for men and women have changed and will continue to do so. Indeed, there is evidence that more and more firms value diversity in the ranks of management and believe that such diversity provides a competitive advantage. Indeed, there is evidence that having women at the top of management teams in initial public offering firms is associated with gains in both short-term and long-term financial performance.⁴⁹

Status and Power: A Cultural Footnote

It is important to remember that status is primarily in the eye of the beholder. Frequently status becomes meaningless when someone crosses a cultural boundary; a Ph.D. will not be revered in a country-and-western bar. Communication scholar Marshall Singer offers this observation:

The Ph.D. holder and the famous athlete have acquired high status and the ability to influence their respective "constituents." Because high status—whether ascribed or acquired—depends so much on its being perceived as such, it may be the least transferable, across cultural barriers, of all the components of power we are discussing.⁵⁰

Cultural differences in perceptions of status are revealed pointedly in the following letter. On June 17, 1744, commissioners from Maryland and Virginia negotiated a treaty with the Native American members of the Six Nations at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The Native Americans were invited to send young men to William and Mary College. The next day they declined the offer, as the letter explains.

We know that you highly esteem the kind of learning taught in those Colleges, and that the Maintenance of our young Men, while with you, would be very expensive to you. We are convinced, that you mean to do us Good by your Proposal; and we thank you heartily. But you, who are wise must know that different Nations have different Conceptions of things and you will therefore not take it amiss, if our ideas of this kind of Education happen not to be the same as yours. We have had some Experience of it. Several of our young People were formerly brought up at the Colleges of the Northern Provinces: They were instructed in all your Sciences; but, when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods . . . neither fit for Hunters, Warriors, nor Counsellors, they were totally good for nothing.

We are, however, not the less oblig'd by your kind Offer, tho' we decline accepting it; and, to show our grateful Sense of it, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take Care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make Men of them.⁵¹

Trust

What do used-car salespeople and politicians have in common? They are often stereotyped as people whose credibility is suspect. The untrustworthy images of such people are not always justified; but when they want something from you, whether it is money or a vote, you are often suspicious of the promises they make. When you trust people, you have faith that they will not try to take advantage of you and that they will be mindful of your best interests. In small groups, the degree of trust you have in others affects your developing interpersonal relationships with them. The following sections consider how trust in relationships affects group members and suggests how you can elicit more trust as you interact with others.

Developing Trusting Relationships

Why do you trust some people more than others? What is it about your closest friend that enables you to confide your most private feelings? How can group members develop trusting relationships? First, developing trusting relationships in a group takes time. Just as assuming a role in a group discussion requires time, so does developing confidence in others. Second, you base trust on the previous experiences you have had with others. You probably would not give a stranger your bank account number. You would, however, more than likely trust this number to your spouse or to a friend you have known for many years. As you communicate with other people, you gradually learn whether you can trust them. First you observe how they complete various tasks and responsibilities. Then you decide whether you can rely on them to get things done.

Trust, then, develops when you can predict how another person will behave under certain circumstances. Put another way, trust helps you reduce uncertainty as you form expectations of others. As you participate in a group, you trust those who, because of their actions and support in the past, have given you reason to believe that they will support you in the future. Group members establish trusting relationships as they develop mutual respect and as the group becomes more cohesive. One interesting piece of research shows that in computer-mediated teams, levels of trust among group members start lower than in face-to-face groups. But over time, trust increases to a level comparable to that in face-to-face teams.⁵²

However, even time and experience cannot guarantee trust. A certain amount of risk is always involved whenever you trust another person. As Richard Reichert suggests, "Trust is always a risk, a kind of leap in the dark. It is not based on any solid proof that the other person will not hurt you . . . trust is always a gamble."⁵³ Sometimes the gamble does not pay off. And if you have worked in a small group with several people who proved untrustworthy, you may be reluctant to trust others in future groups. Thus your good and bad experiences in past groups affect the way in which you relate to people in future groups.

Trust in Face-to-Face and Virtual Teams

Groups and teams that have limited or no face-to-face interaction develop trust differently from those where face-to-face contact is frequent. Face-to-face teams develop trust mostly through social and emotional bonds that grow as they get to know one another. In virtual teams, trust is more likely to develop through task-oriented responses such as timely information sharing and appropriate, sound responses to electronic communications.⁵⁴

The Development of Group Relationships over Time

We noted in Chapter 3 that group formation takes place over time. It takes time for trusting relationships to develop. You experience some tension and anxiety the first time you participate in a small group. You may be uncertain of your role, and the group may not have met long enough for norms to develop. Status differences among group members can also create tension. Bormann has defined this initial uneasiness as **primary tension**, or

the social unease and stiffness that accompanies getting acquainted. Students placed in a discussion group with strangers will experience these tensions most strongly during the opening minutes of their first meetings. The earmarks of primary tensions are extreme politeness, apparent boredom or tiredness, and considerable sighing or yawning. When members show primary tension, they speak softly and tentatively. Frequently they can think of nothing to say, and many long pauses result.⁵⁵

Expect to find some primary tension during initial meetings. It is a normal part of group development. A group leader can minimize this tension, however, by helping members get to know one another, perhaps through get-acquainted exercises or brief statements of introduction. While members of groups that meet only once might deem getting to know one

CASE STUDY

➔ Practice in Applying Principles

Your university has a Strategic Planning Committee composed of the following people:

- The Dean of the College
- The Vice President for Finance
- The Vice President for Development (fundraising)
- A representative from the Board of Trustees
- The Director of Admissions
- The Director of Planning and Institutional Research
- Three elected faculty members
- Two students selected by the Student Government Association
- An alumni representative

Some committee members (administrators) are appointed to the committee permanently. Others (faculty members and students) are appointed to one-year terms. The committee's charge is to make recommendations to the president about new goals and objectives for the Strategic Plan. To do this, the committee has been asked first to review the University's Mission Statement, as well as the Institutional Goals for

Graduates and how they relate to the Mission. Then the committee is asked to evaluate progress made toward these goals since establishment of the previous Strategic Plan. The committee then must facilitate and coordinate the annual update of the Plan before finally making their recommendations.

Questions for Analysis

1. Consider the membership of this group. What source(s) of power can you identify for each member based on the member's title or affiliation?
2. Review the list of group roles on pages 98–99. Can you predict which group members are most likely to enact certain group roles? Which members and which roles? Why do you think this?
3. Rank committee members by their status. What is the basis for your rankings?
4. This is a committee that has relatively permanent members (dean, vice presidents, and directors), as well as members who are more short-term (representatives from trustees, alumni, students, faculty). How will this affect the establishment of group norms from year to year?

another impractical, using a few minutes to break the ice and reduce some of the primary tension can help create more satisfying relationships among group members.

After a group resolves primary tension and its members become more comfortable with one another, another type of tension develops. **Secondary tension**, according to Bormann, occurs as conflicts arise and differences of opinion emerge. Whether recognized as a personality conflict or simply as a disagreement, secondary tension surfaces when members try to solve the problem or accomplish the task facing the group. Secondary tension also results from power struggles, and it usually establishes group norms. Joking or laughing often helps manage secondary tension. But no matter how cohesive a group may be, some conflict over procedure will normally develop as relationships among members form. Chapter 8 will consider some suggestions for managing the conflict and controversy that result from secondary tension, and Chapter 10 will discuss the phases of a group's growth and development in more detail.

REVIEW

► GROUP TENSION

Primary tension:	Uneasiness and discomfort in getting acquainted and managing initial group uncertainty about the group task and group relationships
Secondary tension:	Tension that occurs as group members struggle for influence, develop roles and norms, and explore differences in approaching the group task

Culture

We now turn our attention to an always present but often unseen variable that affects our interactions with others: culture. **Culture** is a learned system of knowledge, behavior, attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms that is shared by a group of people.⁵⁶ We often think of cultural differences as existing between ethnic groups or nations, but they can also exist between families, organizations, or even different parts of the same country or state. It is not surprising that when individuals of different cultures interact, cultural differences can interfere with effective communication. Culture is a difference that *makes* a difference in how we relate to others.

One obvious aspect of culture is language—it would be challenging indeed to participate in a group without a common language! But it can also be challenging to work with others with whom you have nonverbal cultural differences. Differences in how people from different cultures respond to context and their attitudes toward personal contact have a direct bearing on communication in small groups.

Individualism and Collectivism

Groups often have difficulty establishing norms and roles because of cultural variations in individualism among group members. As we discussed in Chapter 1, in some cultures (such as among Americans), individual autonomy and initiative are valued; in others (the Japanese, for instance), collective well-being takes precedence over individual achievement. People from collectivist cultures are therefore more likely to view assertive individualists as

self-centered, while individualists may interpret their collectivist counterparts as weak. Collectivists are more likely to conform to group norms and to value group decisions highly.⁵⁷ We caution you, though, against overgeneralization. Although different cultures clearly foster different orientations, there is also ample evidence that there are vast differences among people *within* any culture. Thus it is nearly impossible to predict with certainty an individualist or collectivist orientation based on culture alone.⁵⁸

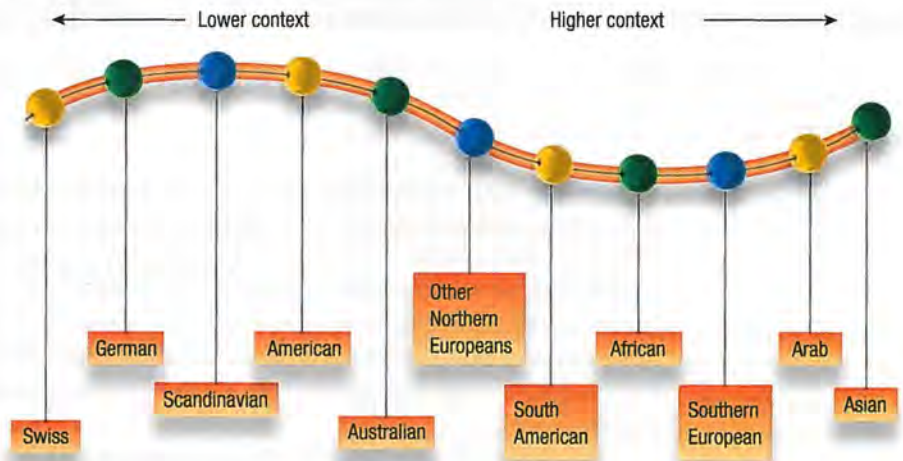
Although differences in individualism always exist in groups, these differences can be extreme if group members are culturally diverse, and extreme differences can result in low group satisfaction and productivity. To establish and maintain norms with which all members can feel comfortable, groups need to understand and be sensitive to the cultural expectations of all participants.

High-Context and Low-Context Cultures

In some cultures the surrounding context of an interaction or the unspoken, nonverbal message plays a greater role than in others.⁵⁹ A **high-context culture** is one in which more emphasis is placed on nonverbal communication. We will discuss the power and importance of nonverbal messages in more detail in Chapter 7. In high-context cultures, the physical environment is important in helping communicators interpret the message. The environment, the situation, and the communicator's mood are especially significant in decoding messages. A **low-context culture** places more emphasis on verbal expression. Figure 5.1 shows cultures arranged along a continuum from high to low context.

FIGURE 5.1
Where Different
Cultures Fall on the
Context Scale

SOURCE: Adapted from
Donald W. Klopff and
James McCroskey,
*International Encounters:
An Introduction to
Intercultural
Communication* (Boston:
Allyn & Bacon, 2006).



Low-context cultures: Information must be provided explicitly, usually in words. Members of such cultures

- Are less aware of nonverbal cues, environment and situation
- Lack well-developed networks
- Need detailed background information
- Tend to segment and compartmentalize information
- Control information on a "need to know" basis
- Prefer explicit and careful directions from someone who "knows"
- View knowledge as a commodity

High-context cultures: Much information drawn from surroundings. Very little must be explicitly transferred. Members

- Respond to nonverbal cues
- Share information freely
- Rely on physical context for information
- Take environment, situation, gestures, and mood into account
- Maintain extensive information networks

People from high-context cultures may be more skilled in interpreting nonverbal information than people from low-context cultures. Individuals from high-context cultures may also use fewer words to express themselves. Because individuals from low-context cultures place greater emphasis on speech, they may talk more than those from high-context cultures. People from a low-context culture typically are less sensitive to the nonverbal cues in the environment and the situation in interpreting the messages of others.⁶⁰

In a small group, high- or low-context orientation can play a role in the amount of time a person talks and his or her sensitivity in responding to unspoken dynamics of a group's climate. Sometimes people from a high-context culture will find those from a low-context culture less credible or trustworthy. Someone from a low-context culture may be more likely to make explicit requests for information by saying, "Talk to me," "Give it to me straight," or "Tell it like it is." In contrast, a person from a high-context culture expects communication to be more indirect and to rely on more implicit cues.

High-Contact and Low-Contact Cultures

In some cultures, people are more comfortable being touched or being physically close to others; these are said to be **high-contact cultures**. Individuals from **low-contact cultures** tend to prefer more personal space, typically make less eye contact with others, and are much more uncomfortable with being touched or approached by others.⁶¹

Whether group members are from high- or low-contact cultures can affect preferred seating arrangements and other aspects of small group ecology. For example, people from some cultural groups, such as the Chinese, prefer sitting side by side rather than directly across from one another.⁶² Fathi Yousef and Nancy Briggs found that in Middle Eastern countries it is appropriate to stand close enough to someone to smell their breath.⁶³ North Americans usually prefer more space around them than do Latin Americans, Arabs, and Greeks.⁶⁴ Cultural differences can also be found among ethnic groups within the same country.

It may be tempting to make stereotypical inferences about all people within a given culture based on some of the research conclusions we cite. But Robert Shuter cautions against making broad, sweeping generalizations about a specific culture.⁶⁵ His research

Cultural differences and similarities influence nonverbal interaction when people communicate. How would you manage cultural differences in a group?



found significant variations in nonverbal behavior *within* cultures. Our discussion has been intended simply to document the existence of cultural differences and to warn that such differences may hamper effective communication in small groups.

No list of simple suggestions or techniques will help you manage the cultural differences that you will encounter in groups. However, a basic principle can help: *When interacting with people from a culture other than your own, note differences you think may be culture-based and adapt accordingly. Become other-oriented.* We are not suggesting that you abandon your cultural norms, traditions, and expectations—only that you become more flexible, thereby minimizing the communication distortion that cultural differences may cause. Carley Dodd suggests that if you think you have offended someone or acted inappropriately, you can ask the other person if you have, and if so, find out what exactly you did wrong.⁶⁶ Being aware of and responding to cultural differences in small groups can enhance your ability to interact with others.

Gender and Communication

Deborah Tannen's best-selling book *You Just Don't Understand* struck a responsive chord by identifying gender differences in verbal communication. Her work popularized a research conclusion that most of us already knew: Both within a given culture and from one culture to another, men and women have different communication patterns. Evidence indicates that men and women sometimes use language differently and that they also interpret nonverbal behavior differently. Clara Mayo and Nancy Henley⁶⁷ as well as Diana Ivy and Phil Backlund⁶⁸ are among the scholars who provide excellent comparisons of how males and females use and respond to nonverbal cues. Note the following conclusions about gender differences in sending and receiving nonverbal messages:

People of both sexes tend to move closer to women than to men.⁶⁹

Women tend to move closer to others than men do.⁷⁰

Men tend to maintain less eye contact with others than women do.⁷¹

Women seem to use more expressive facial expressions than men do.⁷²

Men tend to use more gestures than women do.⁷³

Men initiate touch more often than women do.⁷⁴

Women speak with less volume than men do.⁷⁵

Besides differing from men in their use of nonverbal behaviors, there is evidence that women tend to receive and interpret nonverbal messages more accurately. Why are there differences in the way males and females use and respond to nonverbal messages? Some theorize that the answer lies in physiological differences between men and women. But the leading explanation focuses on how men and women are socialized into society. Women typically are socialized to value interpersonal relationships and to respond to others' emotions, which are largely expressed nonverbally. Also, men typically have higher status in North American culture and in many other cultures throughout the world. And as we noted earlier, those of higher status are typically talked to more; receiving verbal information from others may lessen men's need to interpret nonverbal messages.

The research conclusions reviewed here can help explain some of the differences in the way that men and women communicate in groups and teams. We emphasize, however, that these are research generalizations; do not expect all men and all women to exhibit these differences. In your group deliberations, be cautious about always expecting to see these differences. But knowing that there can be gender differences in both verbal and nonverbal

behavior may help you become both more flexible and tolerant when communicating with others in groups.

Conversational Style

"Jane is friendly."

"Jane brings cakes to my family on festival days."

These two statements reflect cultural differences in descriptions of the social world. People in the West are more likely to describe a personality trait such as "friendly"; the more contextual Asian tendency is to describe a person's actions.⁷⁶

Conversational norms vary by culture.⁷⁷ If not understood, these differences can cause misunderstanding, anxiety, and group conflict.

The white middle-class North American norm that leads one group member to quietly await a turn to speak may cause him or her to wait a very long time when those from other cultures do not share that norm. People from some cultures love a good argument, whereas others revere harmony and the ability to assimilate differences to build consensus.⁷⁸ Some cultures are put off by North Americans' frankness and relative lack of inhibition about sharing negative information. In Western cultures, control is exerted through speaking; in Eastern cultures, control is expressed through silence and in the outward show of reticence.⁷⁹

The topics we address and our willingness to talk about personal matters vary by culture. Whereas Mexicans may talk about a person's soul or spirit, such talk may make North Americans uncomfortable. Persons from Hispanic cultures often begin conversations with inquiries about one's family, even with casual acquaintances or in a business meeting. Many North Americans view family matters as too personal to be discussed casually.⁸⁰

Time

Thomas Fitzgerald recounts an anecdote that illustrates cultural differences in the temporal dimension. While interviewing a group of Brazilian students, Fitzgerald asked them how they felt about a person who was consistently late. He was surprised to find that the students viewed such a person as probably more successful than those who were on time. A person of status, they reasoned, is *expected* to be late.⁸¹

Some people are **monochronic**. They are most comfortable doing only one thing at a time, like to concentrate on the job at hand, are more serious and sensitive to deadlines and schedules, like to plan how to use their time, and stress the importance of starting and ending meetings on time.⁸² Other people are **polychronic**. Such individuals can do many things at once, are less influenced by deadlines and schedules, feel that relationships are more important than producing volumes of work, frequently change plans, and are less concerned about punctuality than are monochronic individuals.

Communication researchers Dawna Ballard and David Seibold confirmed what scholars have suspected: Groups have different approaches to how they use time. Ballard and Seibold found that groups they investigated had three general approaches to time: (1) flexible, (2) separation, and (3) concurrency.⁸³ Groups with a flexible approach to time set fewer deadlines and provided group members more autonomy. Groups with a separation approach to time preferred literally to separate themselves from others when working on a group task; they were more likely to keep the door closed and get away from others. Concurrency groups were more likely to attempt to do several things at once (multitask); they would look for ways

to combine projects and activities. Being aware of how groups and teams in which you participate use time can help you better understand why your group behaves as it does. If you're in a flexible group, you may need to monitor deadlines more closely. Separation groups may need to ensure they don't separate themselves so far from the organization that they lose sight of the overall organizational goal. Because concurrency groups have a tendency to do several things at once, such groups may need added structure and a system to keep track of the various projects undertaken.

The use of time and expectations about time can cause conflict and frustration if group members have widely differing perspectives. Time use and expectations vary from culture to culture.⁸⁴ People from the United States and Northern Europe tend to be more monochronic; attention to deadlines and punctuality are important. Latin Americans, Southern Europeans, and Middle Easterners are more often polychronic; they give less attention to deadlines and schedules. Western cultures tend to approach problems in a linear, step-by-step fashion. How events are structured and sequenced is important. Eastern cultures (Chinese and Japanese) approach time with a less-structured perspective. The observations of several researchers have been summarized in Table 5.1.⁸⁵

Even if your group does not have members from widely different cultures, you may notice that people have different approaches to time. Groups develop their own norms about time. It may be useful to explicitly discuss and clarify norms, such as the importance of deadlines, expectations for group productivity, and general attitudes about punctuality, in order to manage any uncertainty about time that may exist.

Whether a group is struggling with cultural differences or differences in role expectations, norms, status, perceived power, or trust, it's important to remember that through effective and appropriate communication, we can bridge differences and develop productive relationships with others. In the next chapter we examine those communication variables that can contribute to a positive group climate.

TABLE 5.1

Cultural Differences in the Use of Time

In Western Cultures	In Eastern Cultures
Time is something to be manipulated.	Time simply exists.
The present is a way-station between the past and the future.	The present is more important than the past or the future.
Time is a resource that can be saved, spent, or wasted.	Time is a limitless pool.
Time is an aspect of history rather than part of an immediate experience.	Events occur in time; they cause ripples, and the ripples subside.

Source: Adapted from Donald W. Klopff and James McCroskey, *International Encounters: An Introduction to Intercultural Communication* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2006).

STUDY GUIDE

PUTTING GROUP PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

► SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES

Six variables affect and reflect relationships among members of small groups: (1) roles, (2) norms, (3) status, (4) power, (5) trust, and (6) culture. An understanding of how these variables affect your performance and the performance of other group members will help you explain and predict the types and quality of relationships that form in small groups. As you attempt to apply the information presented in this chapter, consider these suggestions:

Roles

- Roles grow out of self-concept, which is based on a composite of life experiences. These experiences are influenced by gender, sexual orientation, and culture, as well as by the significant groups to which we have belonged. Work to understand your own self-concept; doing so will help you understand your role in small groups.
- If no one performs important group roles, point this out to the group or assume the responsibility for performing them yourself.
- If you observe a group member hindering the progress of your group because he or she has adopted an individual group role (blocker, aggressor, recognition seeker, etc.), bring this to the attention of the group or the offending group member.
- Do not try to limit yourself (or other group members) to just one or two group roles. Group members can assume several roles during the course of a discussion.

Norms

- Identify group norms by noting repeated patterns of behavior.
- Another way to identify group norms is by noting what kind of offenses group members punish.
- Consider the individual characteristics of group members, the clarity of norms and the certainty of punishment for breaking them, the number of

people who have broken norms, the quality of relationships among group members, and the sense of group identification to help determine whether members will conform to the group norms.

Status

- Identify the status of group members by the privileges that high-status group members receive.
- If you can spot status differences in small groups, you can predict who talks to whom.
- If you are aware of status differences, you can communicate more effectively and with greater influence.

Power

- People develop power in a group because they can provide information, expertise, rewards, or punishment; because they have been elected or appointed; or because they are well liked or have status in the group.
- Consider the possible sources of power in your group to help you understand patterns of influence.
- Work to maximize the positive sources of power for all group members.

Trust

- Don't expect group members to form trusting relationships early—it takes time for trust to develop.
- Self-disclosure is an important factor in developing trusting relationships with others. Self-disclosure and trust involve risk. Taking these risks with others helps them to do the same with you.

Culture

Culturally diverse groups often have difficulty establishing satisfactory roles and norms because of differences in cultural expectations. Such groups require extra effort in group building and maintenance.

When group members do not share a common native language, some additional tactics may be necessary.⁸⁶

- *Slow down* communication.
- *Repeat* or paraphrase when nonverbal expressions suggest that listeners do not understand.
- *Verify* common understanding by having others restate the argument or idea.

- If necessary (and possible), encourage *restatement* in the listener's native language.

Remember that cultures vary widely in conversational style as well as the appropriateness assigned to topics of conversation. Do not make the mistake of attributing such differences to impoliteness or insensitivity.

► GROUP PRACTICE

Group Roles and Problem-Solving Competencies

In Chapter 1 we discussed seven task-focused and two relationship-focused problem-solving competencies that are essential skills for effective group interaction in certain settings. In this chapter we introduced group roles—patterns of behavior that can move a group toward, and sometimes away from, its goal. Compare the lists on pages 28–29 and pages 98–99. Work with others in your group to reach consensus on which roles from Chapter 4 fit with the competencies from Chapter 1. Do any of the roles not fit into this scheme? If so, how do you explain that? Be prepared to report your results to the class.

Group-Role Inventory

When you see yourself differently from the way others see you, or when your expectations of people cloud your perceptions of them, there is a potential for uncertainty, confusion, frustration, and conflict in the group. The following inventory was designed to help members become more aware of the roles they play and of how others perceive those roles. It is time-consuming (it takes at least 45 minutes) but worth the time and effort, particularly when a group is having trouble establishing norms. The group-role inventory can also be an effective means of dealing with one or two problem members by bringing everyone's role expectations into the discussion rather than by ganging up on the troublemakers.

Objectives: To become aware of the roles you play in your group and of how others perceive your roles

Materials: Group-role inventory sheet

Time: 45 minutes

Procedure:

1. Fill out group-role inventory sheet.
2. Go over the list and check the role you would like to have performed but did not perform.
3. Go over the list again and star (*) the role you performed but would rather not have performed.
4. Discuss results with your group.

Group-Role Inventory Sheet

Who in your group, including yourself, is most likely to do the following:

1. Take initiative, propose ideas, get things started?
2. Sit back and wait passively for others to lead?
3. Express feelings most freely, frankly, openly?
4. Keep feelings hidden, reserved, unexpressed?
5. Show understanding of other members' feelings?
6. Be wrapped up in personal concerns and not very responsive to others?
7. Interrupt others when they are speaking?
8. Daydream, become lost in private thoughts during group sessions, be "far away"?
9. Give you a feeling of encouragement, warmth, friendly interest, support?
10. Converse privately with someone else while another member is speaking to the group?
11. Talk of trivial things, engage in superficial chitchat?
12. Criticize, put people on their guard?
13. Feel superior to other members?
14. Be listened to by everyone while speaking?
15. Act inferior to other members?

16. Contribute good ideas?
17. Contradict, disagree, argue, raise objections?
18. Sulk or withdraw when displeased with the group?

19. Be the one you would like to have on your side if a conflict arose in the group?
20. Agree or conform with whatever is said?
21. Be missed, if absent, more than any other member?

► GROUP ASSESSMENT

Categorizing Group Roles

When observing and evaluating group interaction, a simple way to catalogue group roles is to list group members down the left-hand side of the page (leaving space below each name for notes) and then to enter next to each name the task, maintenance, or individual roles you observe each group member enacting. Knowing which roles are enacted (and which are not) can be helpful to the group. For example, learning that no one in the group is focusing on group task roles can help the group change direction and become more task oriented.

Post-Meeting Reaction Sheets

Often it is helpful to ask group members individually to react to and/or rate meetings at their conclusion. Information received can be summarized and introduced at the next group or team meeting to help improve meeting quality.

You can construct post-meeting ratings using quick and easy scales. For example, you can provide a statement and ask group members whether they agree or disagree.

I feel completely satisfied with the results of this meeting.

- _____ Strongly agree
- _____ Agree
- _____ Somewhat agree
- _____ Neither agree or disagree
- _____ Somewhat disagree
- _____ Disagree
- _____ Strongly disagree

Or, ask group members for numerical ratings:

Circle below the number that best reflects your judgments about tonight's meeting, where 5 means "excellent, one of the best" and 1 means "simply awful."

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Starting/Ending times |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | My own participation in the meeting |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Outcomes/decisions from the meeting |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Efficiency of the meeting |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | ... etc. |

You can also add an open-ended question to gather additional information:

Is there anything else you'd like to add about the meeting?

One-Minute Papers

A way to collect good open-ended information about a group or meeting is to take a minute at the conclusion of the meeting and ask group members to write down responses to one or more open-ended questions. For example:

1. What is the most important thing that occurred at tonight's meeting?
2. Are there things you wished had happened at tonight's meeting that didn't happen? If so, what are they?
3. If you could change one thing about our group or team, what would it be?

One-minute papers can be collected and summarized by the group leader or observer. Such feedback can lend support for what is going right and provide a corrective impetus when needed.