

Types of Groups

All of us are simultaneously members of various types of groups. We are members of the family, members of friendship groups, members of work organisations and members of fan club or a religious group. Sociologists have attempted to classify/differentiate the various types of groups as follows:

Voluntary and Involuntary Groups

Voluntary groups are those we join through our own choice and effort. We may join a political party or a particular occupation. In contrast involuntary groups are those that we are forced to join or those that we are automatically members of without choice. For example, everyone is without a choice, automatically a member of sex, age and racial groups.

Open and Closed Groups

An open group is one in which virtually anyone can become a member. For instance, all can join the any club. A closed group, however, is much more difficult to join. Some exclusive clubs restrict membership so that all cannot join. Only a few elites manage to get memberships in such clubs. Similarly the mafia (underworld) is a closed group.

Vertical and Horizontal Groups

A vertical group consists of members from all walks of life, while a horizontal group consists predominantly of members from one social class. Occupational groups of doctors or electricians for instance – are composed largely of members from the same social class. On the other hand religious groups may have members from all classes.

Primary and Secondary Groups

Primary group is one where members develop close, personal, intimate and enduring relationships. Family, neighbours and work associates are examples of such groups. Members know one another well, greatly influence each other and feel closely related. On the other hand, in secondary groups individuals act towards one another in rather impersonal, superficial and utilitarian ways.

Natural and Formed Groups

Natural groups consist of members who come together in a spontaneous fashion on the basis of naturally occurring events, interpersonal attraction or the mutually perceived needs of members. Family, peer groups and street gangs are examples of natural groups. On the other hand formed group consists of members who come together through some outside influence or intervention. These are groups that are formed for a particular purpose. Therapy groups, committees and teams are examples of formed groups.

Social Group Work

Groups are a fundamental part of social life. Groups can be very small – just two people –or very large. One cannot examine the life of any group without realizing its potentialities for affecting the attitudes and consequently the values of the members. Group interaction is the social force through which individual growth and development take place. It is also the means through which societal growth and change are accomplished.

Definition of social group work:

“Social Group Work is a method through which individuals in groups and in agency settings are helped by a worker who guides their interaction in programme activities so that they may relate themselves to others and experience growth opportunities in accordance with their needs and capacities to the end of the individual, group and community development”

Principles of Social Group Work

The Principle of Planned Group Formation

Group is the basic unit through which the service is provided to the individual, consequently, the agency and the worker responsible for the formation of group or the acceptance into the agency of already formed groups must be aware of the factors inherent in the group situation that make the given group a positive potential for individual growth and for meeting recognizable needs.

The Principle of Specific Objectives

Specific objectives for individual as well as group development must be consciously formulated by the worker in harmony with group wishes and capacities and in keeping with agency function.

The Principle of Purposeful Worker Group Relationship

A consciously purposeful relationship must be established between the worker and the group members based on the worker's acceptance of the group members as they are and upon the groups willingness to accept help from the worker because of the confidence the members have in him and in the agency.

The Principle of Continuous Individualization

In group work it is recognized that groups are different and that individuals utilize group experience in a variety of ways to meet their differing needs; consequently, continuous

individualization must be practised by the worker. Groups and individuals in the group must be understood as developing and changing.

The Principle of Guided Group Interaction

In group work the primary source of energy which propels the group and influences the individuals to change are the interaction and reciprocal responses of the members. The group worker influences this interaction by the type and the quality of participation.

The Principle of Democratic Group Self Determination

In group work the group must be helped to make its own decisions and determine its own activities, taking the maximum amount of responsibility in line with the capacity and ability. The primary source of control over the group is the group itself.

The Principle of Flexible Functional Organization

In group work, the group worker guides the group by setting up an organization to meet the group needs. The organization thus established should be understood by the group members, should be flexible and encouraged only if it meets the felt need of the members. The organization should be adaptive and should change as the group changes.

The Principle of Progressive Programme Experiences

In social group work, the program experiences in which the group engages should begin at the level of the member interest, need, experience and competence and should progress in relation to the developing capacity of the group.

The Principle of Resource Utilization

In social group work, the total environment of the agency and the community possess resources which should be utilized to enrich the content of group experience for individuals and for the group as a whole.

The Principle of Evaluation

In social group work, continuous evaluation of process and programmes in terms of outcomes is essential. Worker, group and agency share in this procedure as a means of guaranteeing this greatest possible self fulfilment.

Stages of Group Development

Groups have individuals to achieve goals of both individuals and groups. Group development is necessary to gain objectives and this includes some essential stages as recognised by Tuckman in 1965.

Forming

In this stage, most group members are positive and polite. Some are anxious, as they haven't fully understood what work the group will do. Others are simply excited about the task ahead. As leader, one plays a dominant role at this stage, because group members' roles and responsibilities aren't clear. This stage can last for some time, as people start to work together, and as they make an effort to get to know their new colleagues.

Storming

Next, the group moves into the storming phase, where people start to push against the boundaries established in the forming stage. This is the stage where many groups fail. Storming often starts where there is a conflict between group members' natural working styles. People may work in different ways for all sorts of reasons but, if differing working styles cause unforeseen problems, they may become frustrated. Storming can also happen in other situations. For example, group members may challenge one's authority. Or, if one has not defined clearly how the group will work, people may feel overwhelmed by their workload, or they could be uncomfortable with the approach one is using. Some may question the worth of the group's goal, and they may resist taking on tasks. Group members who stick with the task at hand may experience stress, particularly as they don't have the support of established processes, or strong relationships with their colleagues.

Norming

Gradually, the group moves into the norming stage. This is when people start to resolve their differences, appreciate colleagues' strengths, and respect your authority as a leader. Now that group members know one another better, they may socialize together, and they are able to ask one another for help and provide constructive feedback. People develop a stronger commitment to the group goal, and start to see good progress towards it. There is often a

prolonged overlap between storming and norming, because, as new tasks come up, the group may lapse back into behavior from the storming stage.

Performing

The group reaches the performing stage, when hard work leads, without friction, to the achievement of the group's goal. The structures and processes that one has set up support this well. As leader, one can delegate much of his work, and he can concentrate on developing group members. It feels easy to be part of the team at this stage, and people who join or leave would not disrupt performance.

Adjourning

Many groups will reach this stage eventually. For example, project groups exist for only a fixed period, and even permanent teams may be disbanded through organizational restructuring. Group members who like routine, or who have developed close working relationships with colleagues, may find this stage difficult, particularly if their future now looks uncertain.