

Group Process

Center for Student Involvement Resources

Group process refers to how an organization's members work together to get things done. Typically, organizations spend a great deal of time and energy setting and striving to reach goals but give little consideration to what is happening between and to the group's greatest resource – its members.

Organizational problems can be alleviated early if one understands and observes the group process. Elements of an organization that typically influence the group process include communication, participation, decision making and role fulfillment.

Communication

1. Who talks? For how long? How often?
2. At whom do people look when they speak?
 - Single-out individuals, possible supporters
 - The group
 - No one
3. Who talks after whom? Who interrupts whom?
4. What style of communication is used (assertions, questions, tone of voice, gestures, etc.)?
5. Participation
6. Who are the high participants? Who are the low participants?
7. Do you see any shift in participation (e.g., highs become quiet, lows suddenly become talkative)?
8. How are the silent people treated? How is their silence interpreted? Consent? Disagreement? Disinterest? Fear? Etc.?
9. Who talks to whom? Do you see any reason for this in the group's interactions?
10. Who keeps the ball rolling? Why?

Decision Making

1. Does anyone make a decision and carry it out without checking with other group members (self-authorized)? For example, one person decides on the topic to be discussed and immediately begins to talk about it. What effect does this have on other group members?
2. Does the group drift from topic to topic? Who topic jumps? Do you see any reason for this in the group's interactions?
3. Who supports other members' suggestions or decisions? Does this support result in the two members deciding the topic or activity for the group (handclasp)?
4. Is there any evidence of a majority pushing a decision through over other members?'
5. Is there any attempt to get all members participating in a decision (consensus)? What affect the other group members? Objections? Do they call for a vote (majority support)? What effect does this seem to have on the group?

*Adapted from the NJIT Lisa A. Pierce Center for Student Leadership
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6. Does anyone make any contributions that do not receive any kind of response or recognition? What effect does this have on the member?

Organizational Roles

A variety of crucial roles need to be filled to ensure group goal accomplishment and success.

Roles are distributed among three types:

1. Task

- Primarily expressed through trying to accomplish group tasks. Examples: initiator, contributor, information seeker, elaborator, orientator, energizer, recorder

2. Maintenance

- Oriented toward improving relationships among members. Examples: encourager, harmonizer, compromiser

3. Self Oriented

- Focuses on personal needs regardless of group concerns. Examples: aggressor, recognition seeker, dominator, blocker.

The kinds of observations you make give you clues to other important things which may be going on in the group (e.g., such as who leads whom or who influences whom). Process observation requires patience and the ability to focus on everyone in the group. Paying attention to these questions and roles can help you to better understand how the group is affecting its members and vice versa.

Once you understand the group process (how the group functions) you can take small steps to move the organization into a more productive direction. Student Leadership Programs staff can make suggestions on how to improve the group process. If you are uncomfortable making observations, a Center for Student Involvement staff member can observe your organization as an unbiased outsider.