



The roles people play when in a group setting...

'Group dynamics' is the study of how people relate to each other when involved in a variety of group settings. In most small groups (and larger groups too), participants will adopt a variety of roles. These characteristics are shaped by a number of factors such as: who else is in the group, the task the group is focusing on, the leader, the style of leadership and personal perspectives about one's own strengths, capacities and experiences. Therefore, how leaders effectively manage individuals is paramount to working in smaller or larger groups. Every group will consist of a variety of individuals who will bring their own personalities, attitudes, values and behaviour to the group dynamics. Here are some of the different characters that you might find in your team adapted from the definitions described in 'Small Group Leader' by John Mallison...

Harmoniser: Attempts to reconcile disagreements. Minimises conflict. A 'let us all be friends' approach reduces tension. 'Blessed are the peacemakers', but not if it means sweeping conflict under the rug! Conflict will need to be wisely confronted and not avoided or diffused.



Blocker: Interferes with dynamics and group tasks. Goes off on a tangent and often reacts negatively to instructions. Watch their behaviour, listen to their comments and look at how others are responding to them. Consciously 'act' towards this person rather than 'react'. Don't become defensive. Model a positive spirit yourself and try not to get too downhearted.



Helper: Open, communicative and engages well with others. Is warm, friendly, willing to get involved and makes it easy for others to contribute to the group. Also clarifies issues, so as leader ensure that you support your helper(s) and ensure that this is an essential part of your own role too.



Lecturer: Often puts discussion on a high plane and likes to imply they know it all. This type of person can at times make others feel inferior and threatened. However, they can also lift the discussion and get people thinking. Affirm their contributions, question them too and endeavour to help them appreciate the input from every member of the group.



Daydreamer: Is indifferent, passive and quiet, regularly withdrawing from the group because they are easily distracted, bored, or not concentrating. Shy people should be made to feel wanted, and to feel that it is ok to be a silent member. Try and include them at all times, be sensitive and ask for their opinions without embarrassing them in front of everyone.



Student: Relies on authority, sanction and acknowledgement from others. Keen and willing to learn, affirm their desire in this person and ask them questions too because learning involves understanding as well as knowledge.



Fighter: Aggressive. Dominates others. Deflates ego and can show hostility to the group and various individuals. If someone is caught in the crossfire, the person's behaviour needs to be challenged head-on, but try and avoid confrontation. Rebuking this person within the group should be avoided if possible, but not at the expense of others being destroyed.



Initiator: Suggests new ideas. Proposes solutions. Brings an objective view and a positive attitude to the group. However, initiators have a tendency to take over so manage them wisely. Trust your own hunches about direction and tempo of the group.



Joker: Clowns. Jokes. Mimics others. Disrupts the flow of the group. They can be a hindrance (when overplayed) or a help when relieving tension and conflict. Clowning can be their way of drawing attention to themselves so try and direct attention away from them. Keep focused and if they persist, give them a task which will hopefully divert their energy and focus.



Dominator: Interrupts others. Dogmatic. Tries to assert authority and likes being centre of attention. Deeper problems might be the cause of their behaviour such as lack of recognition and affirmation, and a deep insecurity. Affirm when opportunities arise and draw others into the conversation such as the 'helpers' and 'harmonisers' as they can be very useful allies!

