

Group Dynamics: An Observational Case Study in Group Behaviour

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Abstract

Background:

- Group dynamics encompasses a system of complex interactions and behaviours influenced by social norms and individual motives.
- The study of group behaviour is a popular topic in the scholarly literature and has versatile applicability including understanding group decision making and facilitating teamwork.

Research Question:

- What processes are observed in the formation and development of an average group? How do these observations compare to the existing literature?

Methods:

- Observational case study approach, recording the experiences of an in-class group over the duration of 12 weeks with attention to three key areas of group behaviour: group formation, structure and conflict.
- 4 participants (N=4; 75% female) with an age ranged between 19-25 years ($M= 22.5$; $SD= 2.65$)
- Comparative approach is used to understand observations in the context of previous research, contrasting in-class group observed experiences with relevant peer-reviewed literature.

Results:

- Group dynamics encompasses complex interactions of both explicit and implicit social norms. Their complex nature presents challenges and inevitable conflicts as presented both in the literature and in-class group experiences.

Discussion:

- Findings present support for previous research on social influences, group developmental stages, and the negative impact of conflicting perceptions of task conflict, between group members, on task performance.

Research Question

What observations in the areas of formation and development, structure, and conflict are seen with an in-class group over the duration of 12 weeks? How do these observations compare with findings reported in scholarly literature on group behaviours?

Group Behaviour & Structure

- How do norms develop, and what are the determinants of the type of norms that develop? How do groups communicate?

Conflict

- What are sources of conflict? How do groups deal with conflict and approach conflict resolution?

Methods

In-class Observations:

- Observation conducted on an in-class group over the duration of 12 weeks for a Behaviour in Groups course at York University. The in-class group met weekly to work on a variety of tasks related to course content.
- There was a total of four (N= 4) group members, whose age ranged between 19-25 years ($M= 22.5$; $SD= 2.65$)

Literature Review:

- Key terms were used to find relevant articles in a variety of research guides and peer-reviewed databases accessible through York University Library including PsycINFO, Jstor, Pubmed, Google Scholar, Sports Discus, and Proquest Business.

Results

Group Behaviour & Structure

Group Development

- Tuckman's stage theory of group development states groups transition through five successive stages (norming, storming, forming, performing, and adjourning) each of which presents various forms of conflict for the group to overcome.
- The 'norming' stage of development of Tuckman's theory, which can be characterized by the solidification of group structures in the form of norms and roles, was the most influential for the in-class group. Through the development of structural norms and roles, the group became more task efficient.

Group Communication Networks:

- Two main categories of group communication include: centralized and decentralized communication. Compared to decentralized groups in which all members communicate equally, centralized groups take a more direct approach, focusing communications to a central figure referred to as the information processing hub.
- The in-class group exhibited both centralized and decentralized communication styles, however for task completion a centralized communication network was dominant.

Conflict

Sources of Conflict

- Conflict is an inevitable component of groups, present at every stage of development. The in-class group being a task group, often experienced task-related conflict, which is defined as disagreements centered on issues stemming from the group's goals and objectives.
- Conflict took the form of differing opinion on how and when to complete course discussions assignment as well as distribution of work. Consistent with previous research, performance suffered as a result of task conflict.

Managing Conflict

- An agreeable conflict management approach was utilized by the in-class group in order to maintain a positive group dynamic.
- All members of the in-class group, irrespective of gender, took a similar agreeable approach to conflict resolution. This observation differs from previous research.

Discussion & Conclusion

Group dynamics encompasses complex interactions and exchanges of both explicit and implicit social norms. Their complex nature presents challenges and inevitable conflicts as presented both in the literature and in-class group experiences.

Conclusions:

The findings of this observational study present support for previous research on social influences, group developmental stages, and the negative impact of conflicting perceptions of task conflict, between group members, on task performance.

Future Directions for the Group

The group would benefit from addressing the area of leadership, which has been neglected over the term. Identifying a leader would help with the group's organization and focus through presenting a source of encouragement and guidance.