

WORKING WITH OTHERS - INPUT

INTRODUCTION

After exploring in the previous sections key elements in the interpersonal world (understanding power and mutuality in our relationships, fostering resonant communication, developing cultural awareness and managing diversity), the focus shifts now to the inner workings of collective units, namely groups and teams. As we move from the interpersonal domain to the group domain, we stumble into the complexities and richness of working with and through others.



The following worksheets will explore key elements in understanding the functioning and dynamics of teams and groups as well as optimising both relationships and performance within these structures for the fruits in our organisations and the accomplishment of our mission.

MAIN IDEAS

Understanding groups and teams

The complexity of tasks in today's world and the interdependence that followed have made groups and teams vital parts in organizations' success. Understanding the work of these collective structures is of crucial value since, generally speaking, working together has greater leverage in getting things done and bringing change than have individuals alone.

E.H Schein (1988) suggests that a group is any number of individuals (2 or more persons) who:

- Interact with one another
- Are psychologically aware of each other
- Perceive themselves to be part of a group

One way to classify groups is to distinguish between formal and informal ones. While formal groups are deliberately formed and legally constituted to achieve certain goals and may often involve hierarchical relationships (for example: task groups or functional groups...), informal groups emerge spontaneously in response to common interests or shared values (for example: friendship groups, interest groups or reference groups like family, religious affiliations, populations...) and are characterized by more freedom and spontaneity than formal groups.

Refer to the section on Group Dynamics for insights on group members' thinking, roles and interactions.

A **team** is a particular type of group, with added unique characteristics.

While individuals in working groups usually bring together independent work in light of individual goals, teams are organized around individuals bringing together coordinated work in light of a **shared purpose** (collective goals).

Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith define a team as: “a small group of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they are mutually accountable”. In this context, a team:

- Has a clear and shared purpose (common goals or specific aims)
- Expects results
- Has a distinct identity and operates within a set of “norms”, values and beliefs
- Has a leader (or shares the leadership)
- Has distinct yet interrelated tasks and is characterized by interdependent roles
- Shares accountability for goals completion, as well as reward and recognition for success
- A team strength therefore depends on the commonality of purpose and how the individuals are connected to one another.

Refer to the section on “Teams” for more details.

The richness and challenges of working together

As individuals come together (whether in teams or working groups), they form an integrated whole that possesses an identity of its own, apart from the identity of its individual members.

The prevailing wisdom is that people in a collective unit will accomplish more together than as individuals (the whole is greater than the sum of its parts). While this is true in strong groups and teams, where members create synergy and collaborate to reach results far beyond their individuals strengths, unfortunately it is not always the case. In many low-synergy groups, unhealthy dynamics (such as group think, prejudice and other weaknesses) produce poor outcomes, sometimes less than what individuals might attain by themselves. Therefore, the African proverb “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” does not always apply.

When coming together, individuals bring to their collective unit unique contributions that are linked to their personalities, personal histories, social experiences, national and cultural backgrounds... They bring in strengths to be celebrated and vulnerabilities that they need to be aware of. *(The MBTI profiling tool can help you clarify your working preferences - Refer to the Profiling Tools document in the “Practices and Exercises” section 1 for more details).*

People also bring their own values, beliefs and assumptions as well as expectations. Given this complexity, group members soon discover how subtle dynamics can have significant impact on group cohesion and performance. From this perspective, paying attention to the hidden forces acting in and on the group becomes of crucial value for group members in general, and particularly for leadership.

When working with others, group and team leaders are expected to balance many apparently contradicting elements, and manage complex responsibilities to create fulfilling group experiences:

- Noticing and supporting internal and external factors that bring life to the group while monitoring and properly managing others that deplete the group from its energy.
- Balancing between celebrating the individuality of each member and recognizing the richness and synergies of cooperation.
- Managing individual relationships and expectations while keeping in mind collective dynamics.
- Getting things done (maintaining focus on task productivity and performance) while building the body and reinforcing its cohesiveness.
- Identifying the group/team common identity and agreeing on the individual and collective contribution of its members.
- Being aware of the collective unit's stage of development/maturity and managing its progression accordingly.
- Striving to create a functional and cohesive unit while recognizing the inevitability of conflict and dysfunctions
- Balancing between being a member of the unit and taking on the challenging but needed task of leading and managing the unit to achieve its goal (exercising authority, managing processes, setting purpose and vision, generating members' commitment,...). Knowing when to step up and when to step down is a critical skill.

IGNATIAN NOTE

Ignatius reflected a lot on individual transformation (Module 1), interpersonal work (beginning of Module 2), organisational development (Module 3), and helping others (Module 4), however, he says little about groups and teams (end of module 2).

It is probable that the Society of Jesus would not have become what it became and accomplish what it accomplished without the help of the first fathers who had also felt the call from the Holy Spirit. We could call them the first team of Jesuits. This team met in Paris, France but Ignatius had actually attempted to build a team twice in the past (both times in Spain) and had failed. The difference between what happened in France and what happened in Spain is not gathered in any Jesuit source but some interesting reasons could be the following:

- The quality of the people he chose in France, the nine first companions include at least four very remarkable people in their own right (Pierre Favre, Francis Xavier, Diego Lainez, Alfonso Salmerón)
- The competence and credibility that comes from the Paris education (we need to take into account the presence of the Inquisition in Spain)
- The testimony of Pierre Favre at the beginning of his Mémorial explaining what Ignatius could do for him in the past.

Even if Ignatius did not talk about groups or teams explicitly, we can find some writings from other Generals that are interesting on this topic. This particular text is from Fr. Pedro Arrupe's address in 1979 to the General Assembly of the National Federations of Christian Life Communities that took place in outside of Rome. His last point of this address is: "Pedagogical Value of the Groups"

I would not like to finish without mentioning a certain point which I feel is essential to the CLCs—the indisputable value of the group. The group structure falls in between an undifferentiated mass of people and the isolated individual. The group helps to create a homogeneous cell of "people of like qualities" and facilitates, in conformity with a healthy pedagogy, the spiritual growth and apostolic zeal of the individual. Without implying the acceptance of class structures, and various forms of segregation, the CLCs enable groups to form, capable of handling diverse situations. These groups are like cells in the Mystical Body of Christ in which he is present, for they are gathered in his name. In other words, the group experiences a basic community, and the beginnings of a fellowship which has to be extended to all who share our common faith and also to all those who have not yet experienced the vision which belief in Jesus offers.

But let me also add a few words on the duties of a CLC group. Do not ask: "What can the group give me?" Ask instead: "What can I contribute to the group?" Passivity is like a cancer in a group. The group lives off the life of its members, each of whom, in turn, receives back many times over his or her own contributions. For the group—ideally—helps a person to be open, teaches the art of dialogue and the virtue of tolerance; enriches an individual's point of view and introduces such an individual to a healthy pluralism. A group, moreover, deepens an individual's faith by challenging him or her to explain it and share it; creates a climate of trust in which persons can offer or receive help; and names the deep fellowship experienced in the group as a revelation of the fatherhood of God.

EXPECTED LEARNINGS AND OUTCOMES

1. Reflecting on the challenges and gifts of working with others
2. Introducing key elements in understanding teams and groups
3. Reflecting on personal experiences and assessing collaborative work

"A miracle is when the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A miracle is when one plus one equals a thousand."

Frederick Buechner