

## Studying Group Processes

### Social sciences

Of course there are many social sciences, not only group process, therefore we should assess correctly the importance of social psychology. Organisations exist for long and answer to a whole range of motivations. They are however static entities that new forms of Internet based horizontality challenge. That is in fact my motivation to have a close look at social psychology.

### Individual behaviour

Two main concepts arise from our reflection: Groups and Good. Good is a value judgment not only in our case of the manners of the government but also of the individuals. In effect, good governance brings a new social contract between the government and the citizens. As electronic governance tends to bring government and citizens closer the one to the other, good faith and control of behaviour become more important in this context. This brings us to go deeper to the basis of and individual behaviour in a group. In effect, we think that one cannot really understand and evaluate correctly the contextual environment and business risks of any eGovernance project without taking into consideration not only the behaviour of subjects but also that of their executives and, as the whole context of eGovernance is surrounded by human groups, group processes or social psychology is the place to start with as we shall see.

### Social psychology

As we try to define the civil society, it becomes evident that the understanding of this fundamental element of the civil society - the group – has to be defined extensively in its reality. In addition to the themes above, we shall examine how social psychologists answer to these relevant questions: how does a group form, how does it function to choose and reach its objectives, how is it maintained and managed and eventually what makes it worth existing or doomed to disappear. As I did for other topics of this master thesis, I based this study on an excellent book, edited for the second time in 2000 and written by Rupert Brown (BROWN, 2000), who is presently professor of social psychology at the University of Sussex (UK).

The group, according to Brown, has the following definition: *“The simpler and more comprehensive definition adopted here is two or more people possessing a common social identification and whose existence as a group is recognized by a third party”*. This definition would perfectly apply to NGO. Compare it with the confusion of definitions evoked hereunder.

*“People's lives are inescapably bound with the groups to which they belong. Whether at home, work or play, human beings are essentially group beings. Thus, an understanding of behaviour in group settings is a central task for social psychology.*

*The crowd can be considered as an elementary form of group. Some have suggested that in crowds people become deindividuated and, as a result, act in an antisocial, unreasoning and uncontrolled fashion. However, a careful study of crowd and crowd-like situations reveals that people's behaviour can sometimes become more prosocial and is often aimed at specific targets (suggesting some goal directedness).*

*Most instances of collective behaviour involve more than one group. Once this intergroup aspect is recognized, it is possible to see behaviour in groups as becoming more and not less regulated involving a change rather than a loss of identity. People's social identities, as group member, become more important, their personal identities as unique individuals less so”.*

Group Processes aims to deepen our understanding of relationships within and between groups by means of three key ideas.

- First, groups are a source of social identity; our sense of who we are and what we are worth derives from our group memberships.
- Second, there is a constant tension in group life between its task and socio-emotional aspects, “getting on with the job” whilst also “getting on with people”.
- Third, group dynamics are frequently governed by comparison processes; both within the group and between the ingroup and various out-group.

Naturally, Brown, and visibly all his fellow researchers referenced in his book, and there are more than 500 of them, ignore ICT or Internet based groups. But all this study material will be absolutely invaluable in thinking about e-Governance of the Civil Society and, once more, will allow us to think not only from an ICT perspective, but much more from the very basis of human behaviour's perspective.

At paragraph **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.** above, we questioned the troubled relations between governments and the civil society. Brown has a clear view about this and we share it. He says that governments are afraid of groups and promotes individualism in all its forms. Generally speaking, groups have bad press.

But we have to admit that groups are an inescapable part of human existence. Like them or not, they simply are not going to go away. People grow up in groups, sometimes called families; they work in groups, as engine crews, design teams or hunting parties; they learn in groups; they play in groups, in a multitude of team games; they make decisions in groups, whether these be government committees, village councils or courtroom juries; and, of course, they also fight in groups, as street gangs, revolutionary cadres and national armies. Many of today's most pressing social problems involve groups of various kinds. In all these examples we are concerned with people's behaviour as group member.

For further reference, turn to Kurt Lewin, Muzafer Sherif and Henri Tajfel who are the three founders of modern group psychology.

### *Teachings of social psychology*

Social psychology makes the assumption that dynamics within groups and dynamics between groups are closely related.

### **Three recurring themes**

The first is the idea that groups are a source of social identity for people

The second theme is the distinction between task and socio-emotional orientations that have to do with task performance and the achievement of group goals. People in groups are basically concerned with achieving some task; to do this successfully they need to be sensitive to other group members' needs and motives. This links us to themes like leadership, social influence and group productivity.

Thus we can see that theory of group processes will help us seriously to glimpse a solution for the problematic of governing in a horizontal structure.

The third theme is about the importance of social comparison processes. Other people serve as vital reference points for the evaluation of our abilities and the validation of our opinions

Now suppose you have your ideas, sufficient motivation and energy and decide to create an NGO. You will need resources and in order to get them, you will need not only a concrete project but members. Ask yourself the question: *What factors will govern the choice of an individual to seek out an association like yours and then to attempt to join it voluntarily?* Levine and Moreland (LEVINE, 1994) suggest one answer: people look to join groups that will be maximally rewarding to them and minimally costly. This reminds instantly the modern theory of organisations and confirms my point that Man is really at the basement of any sociological construction. This proposition stems from an old idea in social psychology, social exchange theory, which broadly conceives of people's social relations in terms of profit maximization, where investments and outcomes can take psychological as well as material forms.

On the practical side, the research suggests that anyone contemplating joining a group would do well to gather as much information as possible about that group to build up a realistic picture of what membership in it will entail. This seems to be especially important in view of people's tendency to have a slightly inflated view of a group's attractions prior to entry. Similarly, on the other side, those doing the recruiting to the group might want to avoid painting the group too rosily to prospective members. Another important factor guiding people's attraction to different groups is the extent to which they perceive themselves as corresponding to the prototypical member of each group.

Our social identity is intimately bound up with our group memberships. Ask yourself the question 'Who am I?' You will note that the majority of your answers will relate to your membership to some group.

The members of a group are usually interdependent; one person's experiences, actions and outcomes are linked in some way to the experiences, actions and outcomes of the others in the group.

### **Interdependence of fate**

A group exists when the people in it realize that their fate depends on the fate of the group as a whole.

### **Task interdependence**

Common fate is the weakest form of interdependence. Much more important as far as group process is concerned, argued Lewin (1948), is some interdependence in the goals of group members: where the group's task is such that each member's achievements have implications for his or her fellow members' achievements. What effect does defining the group's task in different ways have on the subsequent process in the group?

Under positive interdependence people are motivated to cooperate with and help each other and will like each other, and the group as a whole will be propelled strongly towards its goal. On the other hand, in situations of negative interdependence they will be more motivated to compete with others and will like them less, and the overall group force in the direction of the goal will be lessened. Associated with these effects should be a greater amount of communication about the task and higher group productivity in the positively interdependent situations.

### **Interactions**

People's actions in a group are geared towards the group goal. However, in all this "instrumental" activity certain problems may arise that threaten the stability of the group:

- Tensions may impede the group's progress towards its goal
- Groups have a natural tendency towards equilibrium
- Any action is likely to produce a reaction
- 'Instrumental' activities need to be balanced by 'expressive' activities, and so on.

How groups go about the business of tackling their task? This has three components: orientation, evaluation and control. The group must first orientate itself to the problem it faces and acquaint itself with all the relevant information. Typically, this will involve a high level of communication and exchange of opinions. These different ideas then need to be evaluated to enable

the group to move towards some decision. As the decision time approaches, the members of the group will start to exert control over each other in order that the decision is successfully articulated and implemented. Typically, at this stage, there is also a need for an increase in socio-emotional activity to reduce any tensions aroused by the preceding stages.

The cohesion of a group has been observed to be associated with such factors as physical proximity, frequency of interaction and similarity among group members and, most importantly, a commitment to the group's goals.

There is strong evidence that enhanced performance leads to cohesion rather than the reverse.

### **Intergroup conflict and cooperation**

One theory links intergroup prejudice and social discontent together by considering them both to be a product of frustration. According to this frustration-aggression theory, both kinds of phenomena are examples of displaced aggression caused by the frustrations endemic to social life.

A direct descendant of frustration-aggression theory is relative deprivation theory. The core idea of this theory is that people become discontented when they perceive a negative discrepancy between their current standard of living and the standard of living they believe they deserve.

### **Thinking about groups**

A key feature of human cognition is people's need and ability to categorize the world. This arises because of the amount and complexity of information they, must deal with. Two important intergroup consequences of categorization are, first, that it can lead to behavioural discrimination in the treatment of ingroup and outgroup members. Being simply classified as a category member, on however trivial a basis, can generate biased reward allocations which favour the ingroup. A second consequence is that the ingroup and outgroup are rarely seen as equally internally homogeneous. From the perspective of a majority group, usually the outgroup is seen as more homogeneous than the ingroup, especially on judgmental dimensions peripheral to its identity. But minority groups, or groups at early stages of their formation, will typically see themselves as more homogeneous than outgroups, particularly on identity relevant criteria.

Three important aspects of stereotypes are their role in legitimating existing intergroup inequalities; their nature as expectancies that bias judgements and recall in favour of confirmatory information, and their self-fulfilling quality in the way they can instigate in the group being stereotyped the very behaviour that constitutes the stereotype in the first place.

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