Planning and Presenting in Small Groups

Upon completing this chapter, you will be able to

1. Define and identify characteristics of a small group
2. Compare and contrast speaking individually with speaking and presenting as a group
3. Demonstrate how group leaders and members contribute to or detract from a group’s effectiveness
4. Use the Reflective Thinking Framework
5. Use brainstorming to facilitate group problem solving
6. Participate in a group presentation
At school, as well as in your personal and professional life, groups are omnipresent, so much so that the ability to work in one is among the most important communication skills to master. You may, for example, have chosen to join an improv group, a sports team, or a cappella group. On the other hand, you also may have found yourself assigned to work with others in various classes on group projects. When this happens, how do you characteristically react? Do you voice objections, asserting that you prefer to work independently? Experience has made some of us “group-shy”—at least in part because of the belief that some group members act in ways that undermine the group’s functioning. We may have witnessed this personally or experienced it vicariously by viewing programs such as Big Brother, The Amazing Race, or Survivor—in which one or more cast members eventually undermines the others in order to win the game. The opposite, of course, is the case with performance or project groups where all need to work interdependently. Whatever the nature of your group, whether you choose to join it or are assigned to it, its success depends on the ability to work together and coordinate your efforts. During both your college and professional career, it is very likely that you will need to engage in a multitude of group projects, including speaking as part of a panel at an academic conference or completing a task with a small group.

A small group is composed of a limited number of people who communicate over a period of time to make decisions and accomplish specific goals. Groups comprising five to seven people usually function best because members are able to communicate easily, but it is not uncommon for some to contain as few as three or as many as fifteen people. Each individual in a group has the potential to influence the others and is expected to function both as a speaker and a listener. Group members share a common objective. Each person occupies a particular role with respect to the others and works with them, cooperating to achieve a desired end. As they interact, group members develop certain attitudes toward one another and (ideally) a sense of satisfaction from belonging to and participating in the group. Members of a group are expected to adhere to group norms—the “do’s and don’ts” that groups establish to regulate the behavior of members and make it possible for them to work together to attain the group’s goals.
Every group defines its own objectives and establishes its own norms. Ultimately, how members relate to one another, the roles they assume, and how they exchange information and resolve problems determine the effectiveness of the group work. Member interaction—what members say and how they say it—affects both the group’s health and its long-term viability.

Healthy groups exhibit five characteristics:

1. Members support one another.
2. Decisions are made together.
3. Members trust one another.
4. Communication is open and candid.
5. The group aims to excel.2

Whatever the specific nature of a working group’s task, whether it is to develop and present a strategic campaign to a client, develop a policy to recommend to management, or discuss conflicting opinions relative to a complex social issue, knowing how to speak effectively both in the group setting and as a member of the presentation team is vital.
Although effective membership and leadership are essential for group success, good leadership often begins with effective membership. All must participate fully and actively in the group. Every member must prepare, fulfill roles and responsibilities, and recognize how their performance contributes to or detracts from the group attaining its goal.

18.1a Preparing Together

To work effectively together, the first thing group members need to do is spend some time sharing their school, work, and extra-curricular schedules and getting to know one another. Part of this process is to figure out each member’s strengths: Who, for example, is a visual artist? Who is into technology? Who is the most organized? Members also should share their expectations for working together. In other words, members need to decide how to work together to complete their task. They can designate a leader—the person the group determines it can count on to keep members focused and who will work out the logistics of and agendas for their meetings. The group can also establish a series of rules for its operation. They might decide, for example, that members must be on time and prepared for meetings and should behave appropriately when another group member is speaking.

Once this initial phase is complete, the task of preparing your group presentation has many of the same steps as any other speech, with the added job of splitting up the work to be done. As ever, you must figure out the audience for your presentation, do research, prepare your outline, and plan what you will say, but you must do all this in concert with the rest of the group.

During the planning period, members should establish how they will conduct their research and pool their findings. Once group members complete the research phase, they then need to spend time outlining the presentation to meet the demands of their assigned or selected delivery format. They also should identify any technologies that might benefit the group’s presentation, being certain to develop a means for coordinating templates for presentation slides, including font size, colors, and style.

Members also need to work out the order in which group members will speak. And of course, the group needs to practice its presentation, including the integration of technologies, many times before getting up to present.

During the process of working out the preceding details, the group actually moves through a number of stages, which we explore next.
18.1b The Dynamics of a Group’s Development

According to researchers, the five key stages that a group moves through during its life are forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. (See Figure 18.1)3

**Forming.** On joining a new group, we may experience some initial confusion or uncertainty. We’re unsure how to behave or interact with others and unclear about the roles that we will have in the group. We need to figure out who’s in charge and why we were brought together. Thus, in the forming stage of a group, our primary objective is to fit in and be perceived as likeable. We also make an effort to find out about other group members and the group task. Once we feel valued and accepted, we begin to identify with the group.

**Storming.** Invariably, members experience some conflict as they determine how to work together. Typically, groups experience both task and relational conflicts. During the storming stage, the group’s members experience tension that results from members’ disagreeing and/or struggling to exert leadership as they work to clarify both the goals and the roles members will have in the life of the group. During this stage, rather than being concerned with fitting in, members now focus on expressing their ideas and opinions and securing their place in the group power structure.

**Norming.** Over time, a clear group structure emerges. Members firm up roles, and a leader or leaders emerge. During the norming stage, the group solidifies its behavioral norms, especially those relating to conflict management. In addition, the group forms a sense of identity as member awareness of interdependence and the need to cooperate with each other increases.

**Performing.** The emphasis of the group next switches to task accomplishment. During the performing stage, often considered the most important phase, members combine their skills, knowledge, and abilities to overcome obstacles and realize the group’s goals.

**Adjourning.** Finally, during the adjourning stage, members review and reflect on their accomplishments or failures and determine how or whether to end the group and the relationships that have developed during the group’s existence. Ending a group can involve having a celebration or simply saying good bye to each other, or it can be more complicated and prolonged, with some groups opting to continue working together on a new or different task and some members choosing to continue relationships that developed during the group’s life.4

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How a group develops through each of the preceding stages determines how well it is able to function. The performance of member roles and responsibilities also affects this.

### 18.1c Member Roles and Responsibilities

In every group, members perform similar sets of roles. Roles are patterns of behavior. Positive group roles accomplish both task and maintenance functions. That is, they both help meet the group's goal and contribute to the way group members interact with one another. Negative group roles are dysfunctional, limiting the group's abilities to realize the group's goal. When a group member, the choice is yours: You can improve task performance and foster a concern for the needs and feelings of group members, or you can inhibit group performance by revealing an overriding concern for self instead of group success.

What kind of group member are you? Consider the assets and liabilities you bring to a group experience by checking off which, if any, of the task-oriented, maintenance-oriented, or self-serving roles identified in Table 18.1 you characteristically perform when in a group. Also consider specific instances of how the roles you checked either contributed to or detracted from the success of your last group.5

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**Do you know your role? What strengths and weaknesses do you bring to groups?**
## TABLE 18.1 GROUP ROLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>TASK-ORIENTATED ROLES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiating</td>
<td>You defined a problem; suggested methods, goals, and procedures; and started the group moving along new paths or in different directions by offering a plan.</td>
<td>“Rather than dwelling on problems, let’s work on discovering how we can make things better.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-seeking</td>
<td>You asked for facts and opinions and sought relevant information about the problem.</td>
<td>“Can you show me what you discovered about why this trend exists?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-giving</td>
<td>You offered ideas, suggestions, personal experiences, and/or factual data.</td>
<td>“The last time we experienced a drop-off in productivity, offering incentives helped.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying</td>
<td>You elaborated on or paraphrased the ideas of others, offered illustrations, or tried to increase clarity by decreasing confusion.</td>
<td>“So, what I hear you saying is that we need to take a more direct approach. Did I get that right?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating</td>
<td>You summarized ideas and tried to draw various contributions together constructively.</td>
<td>“If we combine each of your ideas, I think we can create a win–win situation.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>You evaluated the group’s decisions or proposed solutions and helped establish criteria that solutions should meet.</td>
<td>“We agreed that whatever solution we select should be comprehensive, fair, and able to stand the test of time.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus-testing</td>
<td>You tested the state of agreement among members to see if the group was approaching a decision.</td>
<td>“Okay. Let’s poll the group. In your own words, say what you believe we are agreeing to.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MAINTENANCE-ORIENTATED ROLES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging</td>
<td>You responded warmly, receptively, and supportively to others and their ideas.</td>
<td>“What a great idea!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatekeeping</td>
<td>You sought to keep channels of communication open by helping reticent members contribute to the group and/or by working to prevent one or two members from dominating.</td>
<td>“Okay. Let’s hear how you feel about this too.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonizing</td>
<td>You mediated differences between members, reconciled disagreements, and sought to reduce tension by injecting humor or other forms of relief at appropriate opportunities.</td>
<td>“Let’s agree to disagree for now. We can come back to this later.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compromising</td>
<td>You exhibited a willingness to compromise to maintain group cohesion; you were willing to modify your stance or admit an error when appropriate.</td>
<td>“Wow. I’ll give you that one. I can see how making the change you suggest will put us in a stronger position.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Example</td>
</tr>
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<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard-setting</td>
<td>You assessed the state of member satisfaction with group procedures and indicated the criteria set for evaluating group functioning.</td>
<td>“Let’s see how you think we’ve done today. Did we all come prepared? Are we listening to one another? Are we building on ideas?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-serving roles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blocking</td>
<td>You were disagreeable and digressed so that nothing was accomplished.</td>
<td>“This is a waste of time. Hey, did you watch the game last night?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressing</td>
<td>You criticized or blamed others and sought to deflate the egos of other members as a means of enhancing your own status in the group.</td>
<td>“That idea is the worst idea I’ve ever heard. Can’t you think? Can’t you be creative? I’m the only one contributing anything worthwhile here.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition-seeking</td>
<td>You made yourself the center of attention; you focused attention on yourself rather than the task; you spoke loudly and exhibited unusual or outlandish behavior.</td>
<td>“Am I smart, or what? Did I tell you about the time I won a car?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawing</td>
<td>You stopped contributing, appeared indifferent to group efforts, daydreamed, or sulked.</td>
<td>“Whatever you say. I don’t care anymore.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominating</td>
<td>You insisted on getting your own way; you interrupted others; you sought to impose your ideas and run the group.</td>
<td>“Stop. My solution is the only one worth trying. We don’t need to hear any more.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joking</td>
<td>You engaged in horseplay or exhibited other inappropriate behavior.</td>
<td>“What are you wearing? You look like you just got up. What’s with you? Had a late night with Robin?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confessing</td>
<td>You revealed personal feelings irrelevant to the work of the group.</td>
<td>“I haven’t told anyone this. I lied on my job application.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help-seeking</td>
<td>You played on and tried to elicit the sympathies of other group members.</td>
<td>“Come on. Help me out here. Please also research my part. I’m just overwhelmed right now.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18.1d Enacting Leadership

Effective leadership is a defining quality of most successful groups. Effective leaders are versatile. They perform combinations of procedural, task, and maintenance functions designed to move the group closer to its goal.

Among the procedural behaviors, a leader performs are setting the time and place for a meeting, preparing the agenda for the meeting, beginning the meeting, and summarizing the group’s progress at the meeting’s end. These kinds of activities help to facilitate the conducting of the group’s business.

Task leadership behaviors include giving and soliciting information and opinions, keeping the group on track, and helping the group analyze and evaluate issues and reach a consensus.

Maintenance leadership behaviors include the expression of agreement and support, the reduction and release of group tensions, the resolution of differences of opinion and group conflicts, and the enhancement of morale and member satisfaction.

The leader also must fully comprehend the group’s goals and have a clear vision of how to reach them.

Normally, when we think of a group leader, we think of someone who is in an appointed or elected position. However, leadership is not the exclusive possession of any single group member, and a group need not have a designated leader for members to exert leadership. Indeed, groups in which every member feels prepared to share leadership often work best. After all, to lead a group is to influence it. When influence is positive, the group is led toward the realization of its goal.
Solving Problems Together

The dynamics of a group’s interactions affect the outcomes the group is able to achieve. Although working in groups has both advantages and disadvantages, adhering to a problem-solving framework and engaging in brainstorming facilitate the group’s realization of its goal(s).

18.2a Advantages of Group Problem Solving

Working in a group to solve a problem has the following advantages:

- **Group work brings in the ideas and strengths of all members.** Instead of only one contributor, a number of people with different information and contrasting viewpoints are able to contribute to the decision-making process, so an effective solution is more likely to emerge.

- **Groups filter out costly errors before they do any damage.** Because everyone in a group is focused on solving a problem, errors and weaknesses are likely to be detected.

- **A decision made by a group is usually better received than a decision proposed by an individual.** When several people work cooperatively to explore potential solutions, they usually are able to agree on the best.

- **Participating in decision making strengthens individuals’ commitment to implement the decision.** Participation and motivation are effective problem-solving partners.

- **Reaching a decision in a group can be more fulfilling and personally reinforcing than reaching a decision alone.** The feeling of belonging makes a difference.

**COACHING TIP**

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead

There is strength in numbers. Working together, you often accomplish more than working on your own. A well-functioning group almost always comes up with better decisions or solutions to problems than an individual working solo.
18.2b Disadvantages of Group Problem Solving

There are potential disadvantages inherent in using a group to solve a problem. Unless the group’s norms establish that certain counterproductive behaviors will not be tolerated, they could impede effective group functioning. These behaviors include the following:

- **Personal objectives at odds with the group’s goals.** As a result, the group’s objectives may be sacrificed or sabotaged as we undermine them in an effort to satisfy our personal needs.

- **Too much comfort in numbers.** When we know other people are available to cover for us, we may slack off.

- **More vocal, forceful, or powerful members may dominate the group.** By steamrolling others, we make it harder for all members to participate fully or make their true feelings known.

- **Intransigence of one or more members.** If a member comes to the group unwilling to listen to other points of view or to compromise, the decision-making process may become deadlocked.

- **The group experiences a risky shift.** Groups sometimes make decisions that are riskier than an individual working alone would be comfortable making, a change in behavior known as a **risky shift**.

- **Slower decision making.** It takes longer for most groups to make a decision than it does individuals.

Whether the potential advantages of working in groups outweigh the potential disadvantages depends on how effectively the group is able to perform its tasks.
18.2c Use a Systematic Problem-Solving Framework

A group’s success depends on both its leadership and its membership. It also depends on the nature of the decision-making system used by the group. One method that has been known to improve problem solving is the Reflective Thinking Framework, derived from the writings of philosopher and educator John Dewey (see Figure 18.2).

The Reflective Thinking Framework consists of six basic steps and offers a logical system for group discussion. As members work their way through the framework, they must ask and answer a series of questions before advancing to the next stage in the sequence.

- **Step 1. Define the Problem.** Is the problem phrased as a clear and specific question that is not slanted and thus will not arouse defensiveness? Is it phrased so as to allow a wide variety of answers rather than a simple yes or no?
- **Step 2. Analyze the Problem.** What are the facts of the situation? What are its causes? What is its history? How severe is it? Who is affected and how?
- **Step 3. Establish Criteria for Solutions.** What criteria must an acceptable solution fulfill? By what objective standards should we evaluate a solution? What requirements must a solution meet? How critical is each criterion?

**FIGURE 18.2**
Reflective Thinking Framework

Source: Adapted from John Dewey, How We Think (Boston: Heath, 1910).
• **Step 4. Generate Potential Solutions.** How will each possible solution remedy the problem? How well does each solution meet the established criteria? What advantages or disadvantages does each solution present?

• **Step 5. Select the Best Solution.** How would you rank each solution? Which solution offers the greatest number of advantages and the fewest disadvantages? How can we combine solutions to produce an even better one?

• **Step 6. Suggest Strategies for Implementation.** How can the solution be implemented? What steps should we take to put the solution into effect?

By systematically working through this framework and suspending judgment as they do so, group members can keep the discussion on track and improve the quality of decision making. The Reflective Thinking Framework helps group members avoid *early concurrence*—the tendency to conclude discussion prematurely. By requiring members to explore all data and evaluate alternative courses of action methodically and by opening them to new information rather than encouraging them to base decisions on what they know at the moment, the system also helps guard against *groupthink*—the tendency to let the desire for consensus override careful analysis and reasoned decision making.8

In order for the Reflective Thinking Framework to function effectively for your group, ask yourself the following questions as you work your way through it:

- Are the resources of all group members being well used?
- Is the group using its time wisely?
- Is the group emphasizing fact finding and inquiry?
- Are members listening to and respecting the ideas and feelings of other members?
- Is pressure to conform deemphasized and pressure to search for diverse viewpoints emphasized?
- Is the group’s atmosphere supportive, trusting, and cooperative?

Decision-making effectiveness depends on the degree to which group members feel free to speak up, maintain open minds, and exhibit a willingness to search for new information.
18.2d Brainstorm While Problem Solving

Fresh ideas help solve both old and new problems. Fresh ideas come from encouraging new avenues of thought. *Brainstorming*, a system of idea generation devised by Alex Osborn, allows this to happen. During a brainstorming session, all members of a group spontaneously contribute ideas. The group’s goal is to collect as many ideas as possible in a short time without interrupting the thought process or stopping to evaluate ideas during the brainstorming process.

Although brainstorming is most frequently incorporated in the solution phase of the Reflective Thinking Framework, it can prompt creative inquiry during any of its stages.

To ensure a successful brainstorming session, follow these guidelines:

- **Suspend judgment.** Brainstorming is not the time to evaluate or criticize ideas.
- **Encourage freewheeling.** Brainstorming is not the time to consider an idea’s practicality. You can tame or tone down wild ideas later if necessary.
- **Aim for quantity.** Brainstorming is not the time to concentrate on idea quality, nor is it the time to censor your contributions. The more ideas you generate, the greater your chances of coming up with a good one.
- **Record all ideas.** Brainstorming is not the time to eliminate possibilities.
- **Evaluate only when brainstorming is concluded.** Only after the brainstorming process is over should you evaluate the ideas you proposed.

**COACHING TIP**

“There are two kinds of people, those who do the work and those who take the credit. Try to be in the first group; there is less competition there.”

—Indira Gandhi

Don’t expect others to do your work and give you credit for their accomplishments. Slackers need to shape up or risk being the target of other group member complaints or even being asked to leave the group.
Presenting the Group’s Work

Your problem-solving group works its way through the Reflective Thinking Framework, including brainstorming, and comes to a decision through a series of private group meetings and without an audience present. The group’s next task is likely to report its findings to an audience—to inform them of the group’s decision, to advocate for the adoption of the group’s proposals, or both. Most often, the group presents its findings or recommendations to an audience through an oral report, a panel discussion, a symposium, or a forum. Let us explore each of these formats in turn.

18.3a The Oral Group Report

Approach the group’s oral report of its work as you would any other speech. Your report should contain an introduction, body, and conclusion. Consider your audience and your goal when deciding whether one or more group members or all members of the group should participate in delivering the oral report, perhaps dividing it up by topic or section. If more than one member speaks, make sure you incorporate transitions, not just between sections of the speech, but also between speakers. Like any speech, in addition to being well organized, an oral report must be adapted to reflect the needs, concerns, and interests of the people you are addressing, contain an array of supporting materials and evidence (including visual aids, if appropriate), use language that accurately and effectively communicates its content, and of course, be well rehearsed. All group members should be prepared to respond to questions from those receiving the report.

18.3b The Round Table

When engaged in a round table discussion, group members typically arrange themselves in a semicircle. They work together to share information or solve a problem. Who speaks is not predetermined. Instead, members contribute when they have something to offer. A leader or moderator may help facilitate the group’s work by keeping the discussion on topic and encouraging participation from all members.

18.3c The Panel Discussion

A panel discussion requires group members to be “experts” as they talk through an issue in front of an audience. The positive and negative aspects are debated, usually without the direct involvement of the audience.
In effect, the group replays in public the problem-solving discussion it had in private. While neither memorized nor scripted, the panel discussion is carefully planned so that all important points are made and all group members are able to participate.

Most panel discussions also include a moderator whose role is to introduce the topic and panelists and to ensure that the topic is explored adequately. Panel discussions are held on controversial topics, where panelists may disagree.

### 18.3d The Symposium

A symposium is a discussion in which a number of individuals present individual speeches of approximately the same length on a central subject before an audience. Because a symposium's speakers address members of the audience directly, there usually is little, if any, interaction among the speakers during their presentations; however, participants may afterward discuss their reactions with each other as well as field questions from the audience.

Symposia are designed to (a) shed light on or explore different aspects of a problem, (b) provide material for subsequent discussion, or (c) review different steps covered during a group's problem-solving experience. Ideally, each speaker is aware of what others will present, so there is little, if any, duplication of information. Speakers are typically not in opposition to each other but rather frame their contributions based on their focus and interests.

### 18.3e The Forum Presentation

The purpose of a forum is to provide a medium for an open and interactive discussion between the group and an audience. Unlike the other formats, a forum is a discussion requiring full audience participation. After a moderator and/or each speaker make a brief opening statement, audience members then are free to question the participants, who answer their queries with brief impromptu responses. A town meeting is one example of the forum in action.

A forum works best when there is a moderator to introduce the program and the speakers, as well as to clarify and summarize the program's progress as needed. It also helps when group members are aware of which issues will be discussed during the forum and are knowledgeable about the subject because they can then prepare themselves to respond to questions quickly and thoroughly.
Assessing the Group’s Performance

After every group project, it’s important to look back at how group members worked together, including if they were fully engaged, lived up to their responsibilities, performed helpful roles, supported others’ efforts, used systematic problem solving and brainstorming, managed any conflicts, and overall, were able to contribute positively to the group’s performance and outcomes. By honestly assessing your own and the group’s strengths and weaknesses, identifying the nature of the roles you and other members performed in the group and the dynamics of the group’s leadership, reviewing the challenges you had to overcome in order to achieve a positive result, and summarizing how you might work together differently to produce an even better outcome if given another opportunity, you foster personal growth and an enhanced appreciation of the benefits of planning and presenting in groups.

GAME PLAN

Presenting in Groups

- I understand my group will pass through five different stages during its tenure. I will evaluate how we do in each stage and what we can do better.
- While we may have designated one of our members as the leader who will coordinate the order in which we speak, we are all prepared to exert leadership.
- I understand the goal of our presentation, and I understand my own role within the group.
- I know who will speak before and after me, and I am prepared to transition from and to those individuals.
- Our group will tackle our topic using the Reflective Thinking Framework and brainstorming.
Exercises

PLANNING AND PRESENTING IN A GROUP

Planning and presenting in a group poses unique challenges. By participating in the following activities, you can further develop the skills and understandings needed to succeed as both group member and leader.

1. Getting to Know You

Building on this opening line, “Once upon a time, there was a group of college students who decided to get to know each other better by sharing their work habits and strengths,” reveal something about yourself that others in your group should know in order for you to perform your best when working with them.

2. Assessing Group Interaction in the Media

Mediated forms of group discourse have grown in popularity over the years. The increasing number of hours devoted to talk radio programs, as well as to opinion and interview shows, testifies to this. But instead of engaging in reasoned debate, hosts and guests on some programs engage in uncivil wars characterized by escalating levels of conflict. What lessons can we learn from such programs? How can we use them to help us develop into more effective discussion group members?

Just as you need to evaluate the effectiveness of your own fact-finding and decision-making groups, so you also need to evaluate mediated discussion groups as a receiver by assessing both their methods and their conclusions. Using any mediated discussion offering of your choice, answer the following questions:

1. Was the program’s topic well analyzed by participants?
2. Were both host and guests free to share ideas and feelings?
3. Did guests or host monopolize discussion?
4. Did host or guests become aggressive or abusive?
5. What did the program’s host and guests do to handle any conflicts that developed?
6. Were claims made by the host or guests supported by evidence?
7. What norms appeared to govern the discussion?
8. What were the program’s outcomes? Did a consensus emerge?
9. What was learned?
10. What recommendations would you make to the show’s host and guests regarding their on-air behavior? What communication skills would both host and guests need to possess in order to put your recommendations into practice?
3. Brainstorming Your Way to Consensus

First, read the research findings summarized following these instructions. Then brainstorm possible rationales for the statistics presented. Attempt to reach consensus as to which rationale is most likely. Once discussion is over, appoint a member to present the group’s conclusions to the class:

Despite commonly held belief, chivalry does not appear to rule at sea. According to a recent study, in sixteen maritime shipwrecks dating from 1852 to 2011, two times as many men have survived the disasters as women. What is more, 18.7 percent more crew survived than passengers.¹⁰

Use the following checklist to analyze how effective your group was in discussing its task.

- Did the group define the problem?
- Did the group thoroughly analyze the problem?
- Did the group brainstorm to generate a wide range of possible rationales in support of the statistical findings?
- Did the group evaluate each rationale carefully?
- Did the group succeed in reaching a consensus with regard to the most likely rationale?

4. Analyze a Group Presentation

Attend a panel discussion, symposium, or forum on campus or in the community. Evaluate how well the moderator and group participants fulfilled their respective functions.

5. Approach the Speaker’s Stand

Your instructor will divide you into small groups. Your assignment is to identify and formulate a question of fact, value, or policy for your group to discuss. Then, using the Reflective Thinking Framework, conduct a group discussion on your chosen question. Be sure to outline exactly what you hope to accomplish during each stage of the sequence.

After you complete your discussion, prepare a brief paper explaining your group’s accomplishments and identifying obstacles to overcome while completing your task. Also analyze the quality of leadership, membership, and decision making displayed by your group.

Finally, your instructor will ask you to use one or more of the following formats to present your findings to the class: a panel discussion, an oral report, a symposium, or a forum presentation.
RECAP AND REVIEW

1. Define and identify characteristics of a small group. A small group contains a limited number of people who communicate with each other over a period of time, usually face to face, to make decisions and accomplish specific goals. All members of a group have the potential to influence all other members and are expected to function as both speaker and receiver.

2. Compare and contrast speaking individually with speaking and presenting together. In contrast to an individual speech in which the audience is focused on a solo speaker, a group presentation involves interaction among multiple speakers and listeners. As part of a group, members need to organize themselves and their information to present their findings to an audience.

3. Demonstrate how group leaders and members contribute to or detract from a group’s effectiveness. Every group defines its own objectives, norms, and operating climate. More successful groups have a number of major attributes that distinguish them: In particular, these are effective leadership, effective membership, and effective implementation of a decision-making system.

4. Use the Reflective Thinking Framework. The Reflective Thinking Framework involves six steps: (1) problem definition, (2) problem analysis, (3) the establishment of solution criteria, (4) the generation of solutions, (5) the selection of the best solution, and (6) strategies for implementation.

5. Use brainstorming to facilitate group problem solving. Brainstorming is an idea generation system during which group members suspend judgment, encourage freewheeling, aim for quantity of ideas, and record all ideas. Group members evaluate ideas produced during brainstorming after the brainstorming session concludes.

6. Participate in a group presentation. In many instances, after a group reaches a decision or solves a problem, the group presents its findings to others through an oral report, a panel discussion, a symposium, or a forum.

KEY TERMS

- Decision-making group 405
- Early concurrence 400
- Fact-finding group 405
- Groupthink 400
- Healthy group 390
- Maintenance leadership behaviors 396
- Maintenance leadership behaviors 396
- Procedural behaviors 396
- Reflective Thinking Framework 399
- Risky shift 398
- Small group 389
- Task leadership behaviors 396

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