

# 10

## *Working with People in Groups*

*What characteristics are shared by all groups? What are group dynamics?  
What is the worker's role in the group?*

*What are the differences between natural and formed groups?*

*Why are teams increasingly important in work with people, and how are they used?*

**M**odern human service workers use groups extensively in two distinct ways: (1) in direct work with clients and (2) in collaborative work with colleagues and institutional and community groups. The qualities of a group experience lend an extra dimension to practice.

During the course of a lifetime, people share many different group experiences, some constructive, some destructive, often without occasion for ever being concerned about what a group is or what actually happens within it. Although the experiences may be fulfilling, enabling, or frustrating, many of us never know—or care—how this comes about. If workers plan to use work with groups in a knowledgeable fashion, they need to know the dynamics involved.

People have a basic need for group experience. From our earliest beginnings we have banded together for help, survival, and security. In the past hundred years, we have begun to study groups to try to understand what they are and why they are useful to us in our development and functioning. At present, groups are used in all aspects of human service work, in all fields of practice.

### *Definition*

A group can be defined as a system of relationships between and among people. As such, there is interaction; there are common goals, values, and norms; there is a social structure; and there is cohesion among members. As mutual aid systems, groups meet basic human needs for security, for meaningful relationships with others, and for opportunities for growth

and development. They provide a useful mechanism for social control and for facilitation of personal and social change. Within the group the individuals find acceptance, support, expectation, and opportunity to share experiences and knowledge with others who may have similar experiences, to be confronted with differences in a safe setting, to evaluate themselves and their own ideas against those of others, and to move toward problem solving.

The person without group identification is often a troubled person, lacking security and the support of others who share similar ways of looking at and dealing with the demands of living. The need for group identification is not met by superficial congregations or, necessarily, by the number of groups to which people belong, but through meaningful group experience where there are significant relationships among the members. In no group does the unity and cohesion essential for groupness occur simultaneously with the bringing of several people together. In no group does an individual become a group member merely by being present.

Groups can be further defined as *natural* or *formed*. Natural groups are those that develop in an unplanned way in the so-called natural course of events. The family and the tribe are good examples of this. Workers come to these groups as outsiders. Formed groups are those that are consciously created in order to deal with specific circumstances that are of interest and/or concern to several or many people. Their number is almost endless and can include such things as social groups for purposes of square dancing or play reading; task groups such as committees, boards, teams, panels; development groups designed to enable members to grow; or therapeutic groups that deal with personal problems. To these groups, workers may or may not come as outsiders. Often they are the instrument of group formation.

### *Common Characteristics of All Groups*

There are certain characteristics—the characteristics of any social system—inherent in groups regardless of size or method of formation:

- Groups have a common purpose that dictates size, structure, composition, goals, tasks and roles, process, and life span.
- Groups have to deal simultaneously with the tasks that grow out of keeping themselves going and those that lead to realization of their purpose.
- There is interaction among group members.
- Members have different positions and status within the group.
- Each member has an assigned role that is essential to maintaining the balance of the group; the group will exert force to restrain members within designated roles in order to protect that balance.
- Each group develops its own values and norms.
- Each group has both an inherent tendency to maintain the status quo and an inherent tendency to grow, develop, and change.

### *Natural Groups*

The two natural groups human service workers use most frequently are the family and what sociologists call the reference groups. To these groups, workers come as outsiders.

## *The Family*

The family is the primary group. It is unique, but it also exhibits the characteristics of all groups. However, one must be aware of its special elements.

**Purpose.** The family is a social institution sanctioned by society and charged with responsibility for (1) nurturing the young, (2) meeting the basic survival and emotional needs of all its members, and (3) acting as the first level of socialization and social control. Regardless of the form the family takes, which may vary greatly in different cultures and with changing social conditions, these basic purposes seem to be universal.

**Nature of Relationships.** The family provides a kind and degree of intimacy that is rarely present in other groups. The level of emotional involvement is high, and intensity of feelings tends to be great.

**Duration.** In contrast to most groups, which are time-limited, the family evolves with the expectation that it will be a lifetime grouping. Even though the rate of family breakdown is higher than ever before, this expectation remains the norm and is often the reality.

**Range of Differences in Members.** The family takes in people at all stages of development from infancy to old age. At present the trend seems to be for the generations not to live in the same household, but they are still encompassed in the family group.

**Significance.** The family or family surrogate is probably the most significant group to which any individual belongs, and it has the greatest and most lasting influence on personality development. There are often two primary families, the one into which people are born or adopted, and the one they participate in forming when they reach maturity. The significant family may be limited to the nuclear family made up of parents and children, or it can encompass the extended family, which includes a wide range of other relatives.

## *Reference Groups*

It is said sardonically that our families are wished on us, but we can choose our friends. This element of choice operates in our reference groups—those to which an individual belongs that have significance by virtue of the group members' common interests, values, behavior, attitudes, goals, and experiences. Reference groups may be selected because of their social value or prestige, but whatever the reason, they rank next to the family in importance for members. The growing child's peer group, for example, may constitute the initial exposure to attitudes and values that are at variance with those of the family. Such groups exert considerable influence on individuals, good or bad, and can be extremely useful in working with people.

Initially, human service workers tended to shy away from using these two primary groups. Problems in functioning were considered to be individual matters, and workers often removed individuals from the group in order to work with them. With developing knowledge of group dynamics, however, workers realized that returning a changed individual to an unchanged group usually meant that the individual reverted to the original behavior—the

balance of the group depended on keeping that individual unchanged. When a family or reference group member is in trouble, it usually means that there are significant problems in the group itself, as in the street gangs that exert destructive pressures on members leading to drug abuse and violence. Workers have realized that relationships among group members can be a potent factor in working successfully with people.

### *Working with Natural Groups*

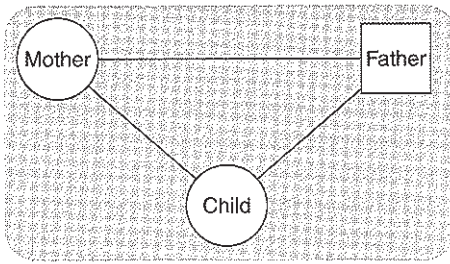
Workers coming as outsiders into natural groups are faced with the tasks of making a place for themselves as a unique part of the group and assessing already established relationships between and among members—relationships that usually have a high degree of intimacy. They will need first to free themselves of expectations of normalcy based on their own personal experiences and then to develop ways of understanding and making use of the complex web that is the natural group. These tasks are complicated by the fact that such relationships are dynamic and seeing and evaluating is done in a moment of time; the relationships are intangible and expressed only through attitudes and behaviors; and changes in natural groups tend to come slowly and painfully.

As we have become increasingly aware of the complexity of our world, we have learned to make and use diagrams to picture intangible relationships in ways that are understandable. Sociometrics is the science that attempts to explicate such relationships and human service workers use sociometric charts and diagrams both in their own thinking and directly with clients. Such things as sociograms (which indicate what is occurring in communication or closeness at any moment in time), genograms (which chart the relationships existing in multigenerational levels of families), and family histories are useful tools in trying to make use of group relationships by attempting to make concrete what previously has been intangible (see Figure 10.1).

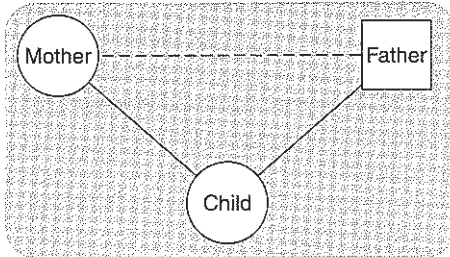
Equally important is flexibility on the part of workers to work with individuals separate from the group or with various combinations of individuals—as with parents alone, with parents and a child, with the total nuclear family, the total extended family, or the total peer or social group. This can only be done effectively if workers are cognizant of the significance of the singling out of a part of the group.

### *Formed Groups*

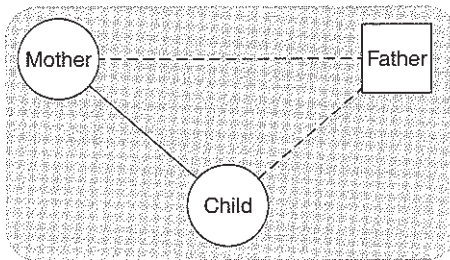
Bringing individuals into a group is not always easy, particularly when the rationale and impetus for the group rest with the worker, or with the society through its social institutions, rather than with the potential group members. The first, and often the most difficult, task is to get people involved. It is important that these potential members be homogeneous to a degree—that they share a commonness of interest, problem, circumstance, and so forth that will serve as a potentially cohesive force in getting and holding them together. One of the strengths of the group, however, lies in the heterogeneous character of the individual members, each of whom brings different perspectives and different strengths to the common undertaking. The worker will need to strive consciously for a balance of these two characteristics among the prospective group members. It is this balance of heterogeneity and homogeneity that makes democracy so essential to maximum group functioning. Mem-



This is a warm, loving, family where the relationships are close and meaningful.



In this family, the relationship between the parents is defective, and both are fighting for the child



In this family, the father is left out, and the closeness of relationship is between mother and child.

**FIGURE 10.1** Parent-child relationships.

bers must be able to use their differences to advantage and must be made to feel free, safe, and undefensive in order to do so. The climate of the group, which ensures this freedom for everyone, is a significant factor in attainment of maximum group functioning.

Group formation should be planned on the basis of established need and with input from potential users or consumers so that the service will be relevant to their concerns. This input can be either in the form of personal involvement of consumers in the initial stages of planning or in their helping with accumulation of data to determine need and interest. The success of the effort to get a group off the ground will depend, to a large degree, on how the worker deals with both this type of information and with the necessary logistics of time, place, transportation, and opening up of communication channels. Although people in general are much more knowledgeable than they used to be about group participation, it is often necessary to do a selling job. Use of media for communication, notices, letters, and invitations can be effective, particularly with motivated consumers, but for individuals who are not knowledgeable about group experience, there is no substitute for personal contact,



which provides opportunity for a give-and-take discussion about the planned group and its relevance to the individual. Beginning commitment can develop here.

The first meeting is vital in determining whether and how the group will actually materialize. This is true of both voluntary groups, such as educational ones, and involuntary groups, such as a planned group of problem boys from a juvenile court. In the first meeting, individuals involved look at themselves and each other and at the worker in light of personal needs and expectations. The transactions that take place here will determine whether people return, whether they can begin to commit themselves, and whether they can risk themselves with each other and with the worker. The second meeting is equally crucial because the initial euphoria that accompanies a new experience is diminished, and members are faced with the vision of the work ahead and the realization that nothing comes quickly and easily.

Good planning is essential in successful group formation and the following guide attempts to stress the essentials.

## *Guide for the Formation of Groups*

### **I. Preplanning**

- A. This is the stage in which the individual or the "initiating set" of two or more people decides that there is a problem about which something needs to be done and that a group may be the way to do it. Need is established by brainstorming, a survey, and/or observation, all of which should include input from potential consumers. The basic questions to be decided here are:
  1. Is there a problem?
  2. Is the problem one that can best be dealt with by a group?
  3. What is the purpose of the group?
- B. The next step is to determine the kind of group, in terms of size and composition, that will best suit the purpose and need. Although fifteen is generally considered the maximum number that can be included and still have fairly intensive interaction, an educational group could be larger, and many groups will be smaller. Consideration should be given as to whether the group is to be voluntary or compulsory, and whether it will be a closed group or will be open to new members after the initial meetings.
- C. Preliminary decisions must be made as to structure. This again is related to need and purpose. A formal group might have prescribed roles (such as officers), a constitution, specific meeting dates and places, and a ritual that is mandatory. Certain needs and purposes would demand a less structured group that provides maximum freedom for members to interact spontaneously. At this point some thought should be given to the worker's position in the group structure—will the worker lead directly or be an enabler for the leader?
- D. The relationship of the group to the host or sponsoring institution (if applicable) must be determined. Such institutions constitute the group's immediate environment, may be the source of its funding, and may make provision for its staffing. Linkages with the sponsoring institution must be established and maintained. Frequently, they provide sanction for the group's existence and purpose.

- E.** The next step is the location and commitment of the necessary resources to establish and maintain the group. This includes provision for essential equipment as needed, space, special needs such as babysitting, special facilities such as audio-visual equipment, and so forth, and provisions for paying for these resources.
- F.** Potential members must be identified and contacted. This initial contact serves the dual ends of (1) interpreting the purpose of the group and its probable activity and membership and (2) informing potential members of the time and location of the first meeting and inviting attendance. As previously stressed, personal contact by the worker or co-worker is the best way in which to answer questions, develop interest, and secure beginning commitment. In cases where group members are children, it is usually important to talk also with parents or parent surrogates. Not all groups require this kind of reaching out in the initial stage. Letters, the telephone, public announcements such as posters, flyers, and radio and TV spots can be used. Again, the purpose and composition of the group are the deciding factors in selection of the techniques for reaching the potential members.
- G.** The initial session must be carefully planned. Almost inevitably, except in compulsory groups, not all potential members will become members. The rate of attrition will be lessened, however, if the worker plans this important first session with two things clearly in mind:

  - 1.** Why is this group being established? What is its purpose? Do special activities need to be designed to serve the members? What is the anticipated number of sessions? What are the goals of the group?
  - 2.** What is known about the prospective members? Special personal characteristics such as age, gender, and family composition are important. It is also important to know what it is that qualifies the prospective members for membership in this particular group and whether they have had prior group experiences, good or bad. Occupation and/or school attendance are significant and, depending on the kind of group and its purpose, the worker may need to know the nature of the individual's capacity for social functioning.
- II.** The first meeting. In some types of developmental groups, members are left very much on their own in the initial stages and evolve their own group. However, the worker should be clear as to how this first meeting should move and whether to be obviously active. It is helpful to visualize five steps in this process:

  - A.** Arrival of members. This will involve direction to facilities such as meeting room, babysitting, and so on; introduction to the worker and/or others if desired; name tags if desired; refreshments if desired (maybe here or later).
  - B.** First total group activity. What is it to be, how is it to be started, and how is participation to be encouraged?
  - C.** Transition to working on major tasks. How will the group move from the initial introductory activity into the major work of the meeting? How will the purpose, roles, tasks, and goals within the group be defined and responsibilities designated? How will the contract with the worker be defined? How will conflicts be resolved and decisions be made?
  - D.** Future plans. Will there be subsequent meetings? When, where, and how often? Will additional members be solicited? What resources are needed to facilitate the work of the group, and how are they to be secured?

- E. Ending. How will the session end? At a predetermined time? If cleanup is required, who will do it? Is there homework to be assigned? Is the worker responsible for providing transportation for members?
- III. Flexibility and readiness to change plans if necessary. Because groups are unique and dynamic entities, the best laid plans of the worker might not be appropriate to the situation. Therefore, the worker must be prepared to "read" the group and be adaptable enough to change if necessary.

## *The Worker and the Group*

Workers who opt to use groups in human service will need not only to be aware of the process that takes place within them but also to determine where they will stand in relation to the group itself. The group is the agent of change, not the worker, and the worker must be at the same time a member of the group—a part of the system—and yet apart from it. There must be a verbal or nonverbal contract between the worker and the group members based on mutual trust; within that framework, both worker and members find their place. Contracts may need to be revised, these relationships may need to be reworked during the life of the group, but throughout this entire process, the basis of mutual trust must persist.

The roles of workers in groups are almost endless and infinitely varied according to the nature of the group itself. They can be included under four headings:

1. *Teacher.* The group worker as a teacher imparts knowledge and develops interest and learning skills.
2. *Therapist.* The purpose of the group worker as a therapist is to heal and cure and to use the group process to facilitate this.
3. *Enabler.* The group worker as an enabler makes it possible for the group to function, to make decisions, and to do the work for which it was designed.
4. *Role model.* The group worker as a role model demonstrates by personal and professional behavior the manner in which groups can be used.

In addition, the workers have to decide what position they will hold in relation to group leadership. They can be either the actual leaders or facilitators for the designated leader, who may or may not be elected by the group. In addition to the designated leader, natural leaders will doubtless emerge, and one of the worker's tasks may be to assure compatibility between the two.

Leadership is all-important in determining the kind of experience the members will have. Theorists in this area have divided group leadership into three categories: (1) democratic—where decisions are shared by the group; (2) autocratic—where all decisions are made for the group; and (3) laissez-faire—where there are no controls at all. The strongest group experience for members is that based on democratic leadership, but the manner and extent to which leadership can be shared must be related to the purpose of the group.

In meeting the demands of the various roles required of them in groups, workers will consciously behave in a variety of ways, using their knowledge and skill in understanding human behavior and group dynamics, as well as concrete know-how about the availability of resources and the ways in which to use them to meet group and individual needs. To be



effective in performance of these roles, workers will need considerable self-awareness because they will be representing a set of values and norms and affecting the other group members by conscious and unconscious modes of behavior as well as by use of the authority they represent.



Nguyen Kwanh teaches socialization and work skills to a group of retarded adults in a sheltered workshop. These three men and two women are classified as trainable and have all been institutionalized for a period of years. Nguyen is a warm, accepting teacher, using demonstration and support on an individual basis. She limits, mediates, confronts, and guides. She uses the group strengths to support the efforts of individuals and is a part of the group, but with a very specialized position and status.

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Robert O'Connor is a therapist working with a group of professed alcoholics in a community chemical dependency program. He is in a definite leadership role in which he confronts and interprets aggressively on a basis of acceptance and concern. The group assists him in these behaviors as well as in support of the individual members. In addition, Robert's role is an enabling one: He opens the way to the use of resources for necessary physical care and family and employment counseling.

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Anna Napoli is a community organizer employed by a neighborhood association. As such, she forms committees and task groups to deal with community concerns. She acts as a planner, enabler, teacher, and adviser. Her leadership role is peripheral, as her purpose is to free and develop the groups and the community for self-leadership. She is the professional staff person who provides knowledge and skill that enable the committees to plan and to act.

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In addition to the worker's role in the group, each individual member has a role to fill, and these roles must be complementary in order to achieve the desired wholeness that is the group's strength. One of the major internal organizational tasks of the group is to decide who does what, when, where, why, and how in relationship to all the other members of the group. Roles and the behavioral norms they carry are subject to negotiation both early in the life of the group and, when necessary, throughout its existence. This negotiation takes into consideration not only the personal qualities of the individuals that affect their relationship with the other individuals and with the group as a whole, but also each group member's specialized knowledge and skill. Roles can be considered as (1) structural—those mainly concerned with internal life of the group, such as chairperson, leader, secretary, or (2) task related—those arising out of personal characteristics of members, such as specialized knowledge, humor, and personal warmth, and affect the life of the group.

Conflict resolution and decision making are equally important to group life. The healthy group provides opportunity for the existence of differences, for open expression of ideas and discussion of issues, and for decision making based on the maximum participation possible in light of the purpose and structure of the group. One of the major tasks of the leader is to get closure—to move the group to a decision and to an action to implement that decision, whether it is when and where to go on a picnic, how to change community attitudes toward adolescent behavior, or what a family will do about its faulty communication patterns. Edgar Schein's six ways of reaching group decisions (to be discussed later in this chapter) constitute a reminder that the decision-making pattern of a group can be both constructive and destructive to realization of the group's fullest potential. Although the purpose and nature of the group will determine to a large degree how much authority the leader has and how it is used, it is evidenced in how group decisions are reached.

As a result of its internal organization and its external relationships, the group reaches a contract both among its members and with its environment. Usually this contract is unwritten, except in institutional organization plans, and often unspoken, but it represents an understood agreement among the members, between the members and the worker, and between the group and its host setting, as to the manner in which the group will work and the purpose for which it is constituted. It is also well to remember that groups do not exist in a vacuum, and that some sort of larger social sanction is essential if the group is to survive. This is as true when groups are used by private practitioners as when used by workers in various public institutions.

Extensive use of group methods is not a panacea. Groups have power, and this power can be used for destructive as well as constructive purposes. Power can be destructive to individuals within the group, and it can perpetuate or exacerbate personal problems. The tendency of a group to push its members toward conformity with group values and norms can be destructive to creative thinking and behavior. The tendency to isolate or punish nonconforming members can be dangerous. The tendency of all groups, as social systems, to move toward rigidity and closure can be stifling and can only be combated by awareness, by provision for new input, and by use of opportunity for self-actualization of the group.

Responsibility lies with the worker to see that the group experience is a good one for all of the members involved, that the purpose is constructive, and that the group is changed or disbanded if it becomes ineffectual or destructive. The initial composition of the group should be given serious consideration, and the vulnerability of the potential members assessed. Paramount is creation of a climate that is nonpunitive, that can accept and adapt to individual differences, that provides support for the individual even though one's ideas or behavior might be unacceptable, and that is flexible enough to work toward change and self-actualization of the group.

In the final analysis, the key words in the use of groups in human service work are *differences*, *similarities*, *participation*, *collaboration*, and *wholeness*. Group strength grows out of the ability of the group to achieve cohesiveness around a common purpose and to make use of the differences of the people involved through development of a pattern of interaction that allows for maximum participation and working together as a totality.

In addition to natural and formed groups, workers are required to work with total institutions, communities, and larger political and social entities. In viewing these larger

groups, human service workers are concerned with the adequacy with which they are performing their primary function, and the nature and effectiveness of the linkages among the parts. These groups are even more complex social systems than the smaller groups considered previously, but human service work in them is subject to the same set of values, generalized and specialized knowledge, and skills.

## Human Service Teams

In addition to using groups to work directly with clients, human service workers use them to work with each other in the interest of clients. The form this most often assumes is the inter- or intradisciplinary team. The modern emphasis on teamwork in human services grew out of five major developments:

1. *The proliferation of knowledge of human dynamics and the necessary resultant specialization.* The breakthroughs in scientific knowledge that marked the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries included new knowledge about people and their institutions. The philosophical belief became prevalent that both could be studied and understood and that this was an appropriate activity out of which could come a better life for all. Theorizing and experimentation generally took place within specific disciplines, and, as knowledge accrued, specialists in their mastery and use developed.
2. *The modern emphasis on holism in human service, and the development of theories and techniques enabling workers to think and practice in terms of the totality of the human experience.* This development naturally followed the era of intense specialization, wherein the tendency was to compartmentalize people and deal with only one aspect of their functioning. The team provides a framework within which specialists can work together to provide services that are planned and carried out in light of the total life experience of the person.
3. *The increasing complexity of present-day society.* The expanded number of options available, the rapidity of social change, and the sophistication of the system and of technology all demand mastery of extensive knowledge and practice skills in order to be effective; often these are beyond the reach of the individual worker. While such skills and knowledge can be secured through the use of resources, as they were secured in the past, the current need for such specialists seems greater in light of volatile social situations.
4. *The strength and extended reach of the team approach.* Use of a team of specialists not only provides more and better knowledge, it also presents opportunities for the "mind-on-mind" interaction out of which new ideas and new ways of operating grow. This could be described as the emergent quality of teamwork, wherein a team engages in a creative process that represents the best use of such a model.
5. *The freedom to use differential diagnosis in determining where the team approach is indicated.* Not all situations demand or even lend themselves to the use of teams. There are strengths and liabilities to the model that must be considered. The assets can be summed up as better use of specialists who may be in short supply, the opportunity for participatory learning, the provision of more comprehensive service,

and the opportunity for individual and group growth. On the other hand, teams can be time consuming and slow moving, and they can lead to greater rather than less fragmentation of service. The major problems, however, are not inherent in teamwork itself but in the way it is used. Once it has been determined that this is the preferred model for dealing with a given situation, it is the responsibility of the workers involved to see that the team is effectively used.

### *What Is a Team?*

A team is a group of people, each of whom possesses particular expertise and each of whom is responsible for individual decisions and action; team members share a common purpose and meet together to pool knowledge, ideas, and meanings from which interaction plans are made, actions taken, and future plans influenced.

**The Team as a Group.** A team might better be designated as a task group because it is definitely designed for work of some sort. As a group, it is a social system and subject to the dynamics that govern all systems—it is a whole made up of interrelated parts existing in a state of balance. When you change one part—one team member—you look for changes not only in the whole but also in the individual members. Like all systems, a team has both internal and external tasks to perform. It must organize and maintain itself and grow, and it must relate to its environment and do the job for which it was created.

The parts of the team system are the team members, who are always in the process of affecting and being affected by each other and who are making conscious use of themselves in a structured working relationship with others. Each member of the team is there because he or she has something to contribute that makes the whole complete. In addition, each team member is a constellation of personal and professional characteristics that will determine success as a team participant (see Figure 10.2).

Each team member brings a unique personality made up of values and attitudes, behavior patterns and norms, and a set of past experiences that will determine how he or she relates to others within the structure of the team. Essential qualities are:

- Respect for and ability to work with people who differ.
- Willingness and ability to share knowledge and responsibility.
- Ability to agree, disagree, handle conflict, and deal with differences of opinion, without being threatened or threatening others.
- Ability to stand and act alone when necessary.

Teaming can be learned in adulthood, but it is infinitely preferable that children grow up having experiences where they can share and participate in decision making, where they learn respect for differences as a part of their socialization, and where they become secure enough not to feel that their way is the only and right way. Such socialization takes place in the family, in social institutions, and in reference groups. As teams are widely used in planning and delivery of human services, teaming may be a part of both educational programs and in-service training. Workers must possess not only the requisite personal qualities but also knowledge and skill that contribute to the overall purpose.



**FIGURE 10.2** Personalities on a team.

Carl Rogers (1995) wrote:

The immature person cannot permit himself to understand the world of another because it is different from his own and therefore threatening to him. Only the individual reasonably secure in his own identity and selfhood can permit the other person to be different, unique and can understand and appreciate the uniqueness. (p. 37)

In our preparation for teamwork it is this maturity we are striving for. From its attainment comes the fullest individual and team strength.

In addition to unique personality patterns, workers bring as a part of themselves a set of latent characteristics that may affect the relationships among the team members. These are such things as age, race, gender, and physical characteristics such as handicap or obesity. When you are part of a society that says that old people—or young people, as the case may be—are of lesser importance, or that gender and race affect the ability of the individual to be knowledgeable and effective, it is difficult not to be affected by the dominant attitudes and to respond to others in terms of such biases. Stereotyping may also be a problem with regard to the reference groups with which individual team members are identified, such as religious, social, political, and recreational groups. Team relationships need to be based on the reality of this individual in this situation and not on a preconceived opinion or bias about what is represented by latent characteristics, by group identifications, or by previous experience with individuals possessing these qualities.

Finally, the individual team member must bring two bodies of knowledge and areas of competence. The first is that knowledge shared by all team members—know-how about



the team, how it is formed, how it operates, how to make use of it, how it can be changed. The second is the unique knowledge of the specialist about how to deal with the particular problem under consideration from the point of view of the expert knowledge and skill that the individual member represents and that justified her or his inclusion on the team.

### *How Are Teams Formed?*

In the provision of human services, teams are usually found in institutions—federal, state, and local agencies, hospitals, schools—where different specialists are represented. Often they are mandated in the table of organization of the institution. Less frequently, they are developed outside any institution as a way of dealing with a particular community problem requiring input from many different points of view. Teams may consist of representatives of different defined specialties, representatives of different levels within a single discipline, or a combination of the two.

Whatever the impetus for the formation of a team, once its members meet together they become part of a dynamic social system that is constantly in a process of changing and moving toward maturity and old age. Like any other vital entity, a team can be visualized as having a life cycle with certain developmental stages. When we choose to think in this way, however, we need always remember that (1) such stages are not absolute, (2) each depends on those that precede it, (3) each team is unique and develops at its own speed and in accordance with its own pattern, and (4) this growth process is never completed until the team is dissolved.

The process of developing into operational maturity can be visualized as having four separate parts with a fifth added for dissolution and evaluation of the total experience (Table 10.1):

1. *Orientation.* Team members are introduced to each other, to the team situation that they are responsible for developing, and to the task they must perform.
2. *Accommodation.* Team members adapt to the group situation and to the uniqueness of the other members; they learn how to communicate with each other and begin to form a total pattern made up of complementary parts.
3. *Negotiation.* Team members become part of the team but retain individual integrity; unity develops and working agreements are concluded.
4. *Operation.* Team members have concluded their internal organization and now deal with the external task.
5. *Dissolution.* Team dissolves into component parts after evaluation of experience—optional but highly desirable.

When a team has reached Stage 4 and gone into operation, it should be possible to describe it as a “mature” system. As such, it should have certain characteristics:

- It should have a clear definition, understanding, and acceptance of its purpose and supporting goals and be able to move toward these in an effective problem-solving manner.
- It should have developed a unity among its members characterized by psychological freedom that encourages expression of differing points of view and does not demand uniformity of thought and behavior. It should be able to use conflict constructively.

**TABLE 10.1** The Life Stages of a Team

Stage	Characteristics	Member Tasks	Team Tasks	Outcomes
<b>I.</b> Orientation (determination of position with reference to setting and circumstances)	Definition of situation Exploration Learning Evaluation	Learn what is expected and relate this to self Deal with lack of familiarity, anxiety, mistrust, stress	Define boundaries Provide supports	Acquaintance with colleagues Understand system Beginning security Beginning involvement and identification
<b>II.</b> Accommodation (adaptation and arrangement to create a whole)	Manipulation Movement and change of positions Power struggles Rearrangements of parts of whole	Find appropriate place for self, both personally and professionally	Provide structure and climate conducive to maximum freedom in and facilitation of adaptation process	Common language and communication developing; values and norms developing; affiliation with team developing
<b>III.</b> Negotiation (transaction and conclusion by mutual understanding)	Bargaining and concluding; establishment of boundaries and content of specialization in relation to other specializations	Use self as a team member—able to communicate, differ, confront, use conflict and collaboration	Define boundaries of purpose and specializations Establish contract Designate goals, tasks, roles	Dependency and differentiation established Unity developed Working arrangements concluded
<b>IV.</b> Operation (purposeful action)	Achievement of complementarity and gestalt	Relate to team and to individual members Use both generalized and specialized knowledge Reach individual decisions Perform tasks	Maintain both internal and external balance and vitality Decision making, planning, and executing work	Collaboration movement toward achievement of goals and realization of purpose
<b>V.</b> Dissolution (separation into components)	Evaluation of process, problems, possibilities, and achievement in relation to purpose and goals	Objective assessment of personal and team performance	Support open and critical evaluation of process and results	Personal and team change Awareness of success/failure and appropriate use thereof

- It should have developed a common language and effective communication patterns.
- It should have defined its roles clearly with a minimum of overlap in a way that makes maximum use of differing expertise and with a flexibility that permits change.
- It should have provided for leadership, structure, and supportive resources.
- It should have made provision for evaluation of its work.
- It should be sufficiently flexible to permit growth.

### *Team Purpose*

Purpose is the glue that holds the team together. It must be clearly defined and be committed to by all members. Without this clarity and commitment, there is no way in which the necessary goals to achieve the team's purpose can be agreed on or the necessary tasks performed in ways that complement each other. In addition, team purpose is the bottom line when it comes to constructive use of and resolution of conflict. Purpose may be designated by the host institution or arrived at by the team, but either way, the first team business is discussion, clarification, and commitment to overall purpose.

### *Team Climate*

Below are several areas that make up the components of the team's climate:

1. Acceptance of the normality of conflict in a group of differing people with differing knowledge and skill and differing approaches to problem solution.
2. Provision for freedom of expression and critical evaluation of ideas in which people can disagree openly, safely, and in a disciplined manner. Such conflict can spark creativity and promote innovation.
3. Definition of the reality of the conflict. Differences may involve ideas, personalities, allocation of resources, procedures, and so forth, but in some instances the real causes may be concealed behind those that may seem more acceptable or safe.
4. Delineation of areas of agreement—and the vital agreement on purpose may be the only one attainable. When such is the case, we start there and build on it.
5. Designation of compromises and alternatives for conflict resolution. These agreements must be honestly accepted and committed to by the team members.

It is obvious that, in each of these steps, the manner in which the team arrives at decisions is vital. A first part of the team's business is to make the initial decision as to how team decisions shall be reached. As mentioned previously, Edgar Schein (1999) identified six different methods for decision making:

1. Decision making by lack of response is one of the least desirable methods and is generally a warning signal that the team is in trouble. It indicates withdrawal, nonparticipation, and noninvolvement, and it can imply lack of commitment to the decision made.
2. Decision making by authority may be appropriate in given situations, but frequent use does not allow for maximum development and use of the strengths of the model. Ability to accept and work with appropriate authority is a characteristic of mature workers and is essential for good practice.

3. Decision making by a minority is another style, wherein a small group takes responsibility for such conclusions. In specific instances again, such responsibility may be appropriately allocated, but when this method is generally used it can mean wrongful use of power and status, powerlessness, lack of involvement of other team members, and subsequent lack of commitment to implement decisions.
4. Decision making by the majority on basis of a vote is the most widely used method and is effective if there is provision for consideration of minority opinion. It is probably most successful when there is commitment to implementation of majority decisions.
5. Decision making by consensus, a natural follow-up for majority decisions, implies that the team members recognize the existence of differences but agree to act as a whole regardless of this.
6. Decision by unanimous consent, in which there is total agreement on the source of action to be taken. Here the team represents a totally united front for whatever reason and functions as a single unit. (p. 58)

There are two levels of decision making in teams—those that are appropriate for the entire team to participate in, and those individual decisions made by the specialist in carrying out his or her designated roles and tasks in accordance with particular knowledge and skill. It is important to differentiate between these two types of decision making.

### *Team Size and Composition*

Structure, size, and composition of the team will grow out of its purpose. Although purpose may be mandated in the institution's table of organization or decided on by the team, team structure is determined by the demands of implementation of the team's purpose—literally, what is needed to get the job done. Small-group theorists agree that the smaller the group, the easier it is to get full participation, sharing of responsibility, more democratic operation, and simpler logistics. Generally, such groups are agreed to consist of five to twenty members. When the numbers are larger, leadership tends to become more dictatorial and subgroups tend to form that may be divisive and disruptive to team functioning. They may develop around a strong leader or be based on friendship or professional identification, on similarity of values and behaviors, or on a conscious attempt to control the group. When such subgroups form and are destructive to team functioning, efforts must be made to deal with them, such as forming task groups that cut across subgroup lines or, in some instances, changing team membership. It is important to remember that when new team members are introduced, there will be changes in the balance of the total team as well as in the individual members. Orientation and adaptation to the working situation are essential. In some institutions it is considered more desirable to replace an entire team—as for example, a highly specialized one engaged in research—than to put in new key people.

Team composition strives for a balance of homogeneity and heterogeneity—sufficient likeness among team members so that individuals can relate to each other, communicate, and work together; sufficient difference so that team members can offer various ideas and approaches to problem solution as well as different knowledge and skills that can complement each other.

## *Team Communication*

Communication among these different individuals is fundamental to successful team operation. Difficulties in communicating are compounded by increasing size and heterogeneity. Team members often come from differing cultural backgrounds in which both verbal and nonverbal modes of communication may vary. Specializations tend to develop their own language, and this shorthand for sharing information within a specific discipline may make communication with outsiders difficult.

The manner in which the communicator, the situation, and the message are perceived will do much to determine whether communication is realistic or distorted. In a working situation in which the communicator is perceived as threatening, distortion often occurs because messages may carry a second level that tells the receiver how to interpret and use the communication. This second level grows out of the relationship between sender and receiver and speaks to relative roles, power and status, feelings, and norms of behavior that exist between the two.

Equally important in team communication is the structure of the team, the presence or absence of subgroups, and the designation of roles. In such working groups, people tend to speak in terms of role requirements and expectations, as well as in terms of identification with a particular subgroup. In some teams, for example, where it is the accepted practice that power speaks only to power, communication may be limited and primarily among members of the team's most powerful group.

Establishment of an open communication network within the team is one of its first and, often, most difficult tasks. A climate of openness and honesty where people can speak freely without fear of attack or retaliation, willingness and ability to ask for clarification and use feedback, and awareness that this will be an ongoing task throughout the life cycle of the team will do much to pave the way for better understanding and operation.

## *Team Roles*

A team is a system of interlocking roles, the definitions of which are never finalized—as the team changes and grows, role requirements will also change. (See Chapter 3 for discussion of roles in the workplace.) New team members learn the expectations of their roles and modify them according to ability and perception. The two most important factors in role designation on teams are (1) agreement as to role requirements for a particular position and (2) agreement as to the boundaries of that role. Without these there can be no complementarity of team action.

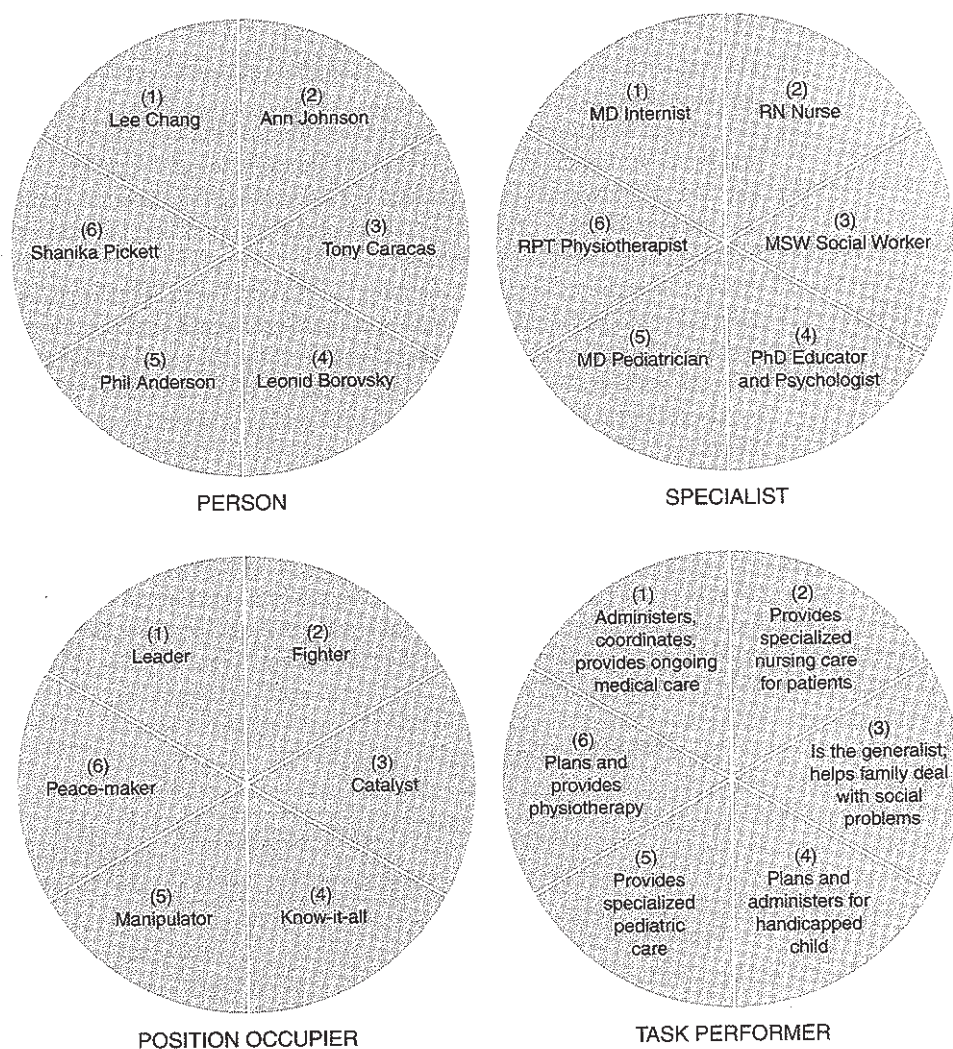
Three major roles are of particular significance in teamwork: (1) the specialist roles, which are defined according to specific knowledge and skill; (2) the generalist role, which is defined by the need for the client to have someone who will integrate the entire team effort; and (3) the leadership role.

The specialist role is one that each team member fills by virtue of unique knowledge and skill. Defining these roles so there is a minimum of overlap is one of the biggest problems facing teams, particularly in areas such as counseling where boundaries created by specific content of the discipline can be unclear. While there must be prior agreement about who does what, when, and how, in special situations—emergency or otherwise—it may become necessary and desirable for one team member to take over what is ordinarily the role



of another. Some teams stress the importance of interchangeable roles. In preparation for such flexibility as well as for better working relationships with other specialists, each team member is encouraged, as a part of orientation, to become thoroughly familiar with the work of the others as far as is possible (see Figure 10.3).

The generalist role, sometimes called the case manager's role, is an integrative one, designed to meet the need of many clients, and is occupied by a single individual who is responsible for representing the total team. This role is frequently assigned to one of the specialists—such as the social worker or nurse on health teams—whose own training stresses



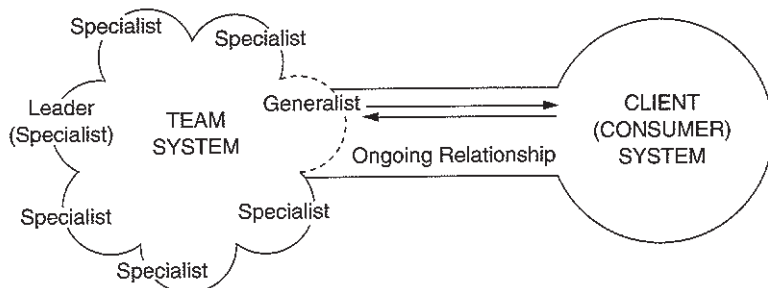
**FIGURE 10.3** Role and function of a six-person rehabilitation team.

such brokering work. Without such coordination, the client can fall into the cracks between the specialties and go unhelped. This is particularly essential where clients lack the ability to integrate personally the efforts of the different specialists. The generalist is a person who “speaks for” the team and, as such, must be conversant with all that is done, able to see gaps that may exist in the totality, and able to act as a bridge between the client and the specialists (see Figure 10.4).

The leadership role on the team may be designated, situational, or natural, and frequently it is a combination of these. It is important that team members be flexible enough to allow for changes or for the emergence of natural abilities of individuals in leadership according to the demands of the situation. There are certain ongoing leadership functions that are essential to good team operation:

1. The logistical functions—provision of support personnel, space, equipment, budgeting, and organization.
2. The liaison functions with the host institution or the community—fitting the team into the environmental systems, working out policies and support.
3. The chairing functions at team meetings—providing information, keeping discussion moving and focused, bringing it to a conclusion, supporting participants as necessary so all points of view are expressed.
4. The administrative function involving evaluation—and sometimes supervision—of the team, the individuals, and their work, with recommendations for retention of personnel, changes, promotions, raises, and so forth. Because of the nature of specializations, supervision often cannot focus on the specific content of performance, but it must focus on the actual performance of team members, both as individuals and as members of the team.

Leadership involves use of power, and it is related to position and status on the team, three concepts that have significance in all groups. Power, or the ability to act, may rest with an individual or with a subgroup; in either case, it is a fact that must be accepted and dealt with. Position is the place the team member occupies in the pattern of team life and relates to the function performed. Status is the rank accorded that position. Status may lead to the



**FIGURE 10.4** The developing role of the generalist (case manager or coordinator) on a human service team.

formation of undesirable subgroups within the team—there are generally lower, middle, and upper status groups—and often the middle groups tend to identify with the upper, creating a sense of powerlessness in the lower groups that can be destructive to good team functioning.

There is ongoing research that deals with the circumstances in which people work and how to make them happiest and most productive. We know, for example, that people work best when stress on status and hierarchy is minimal, when controls are neither autocratic nor laissez-faire but based on sound democratic principles, when the work situation is humane with a sufficiently flexible structure to accommodate individual needs, and where there are clearly defined expectations and equal reward for equal performance with minimal use of special and, particularly, unearned privilege.

A good team is a microcosm of democracy and, as such, is a growth experience for its members and an effective way to increase their effectiveness in this day of specialization.

### *Working Process of Teams*

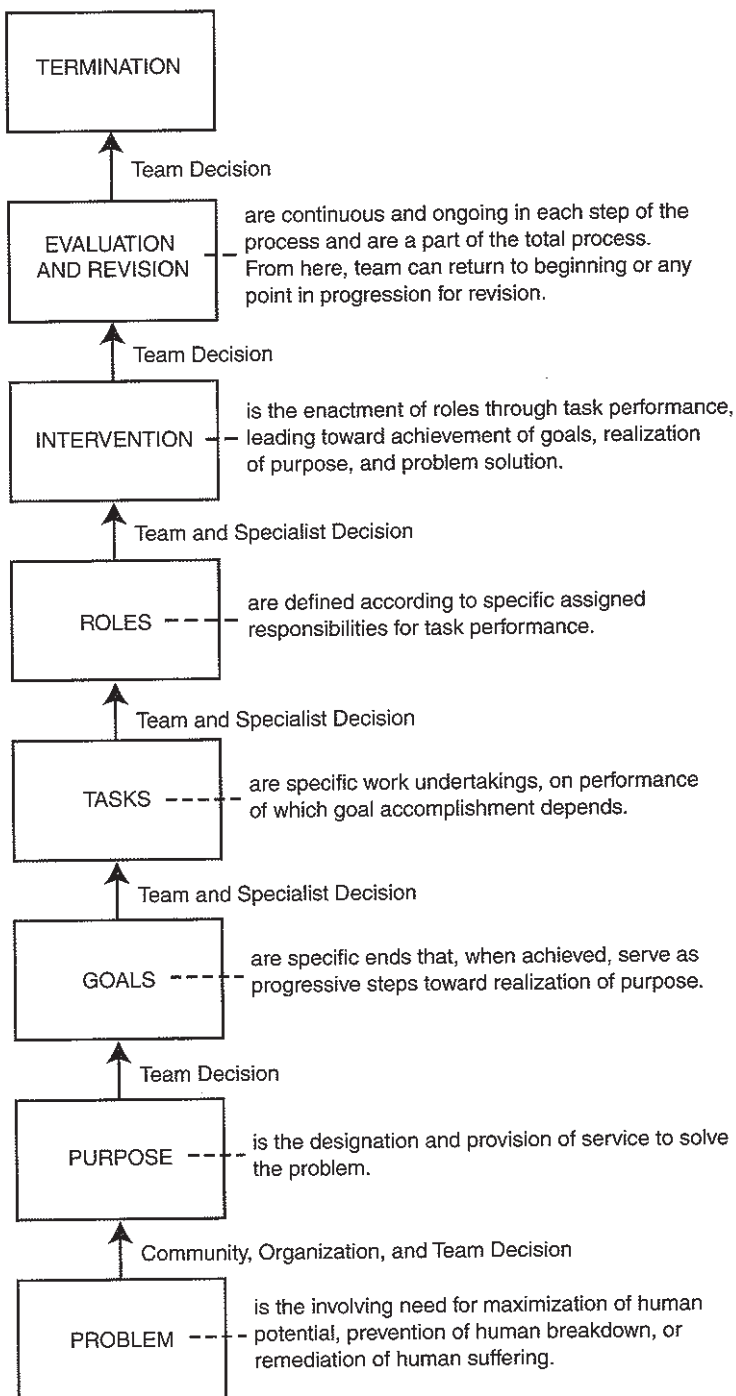
Teams in human service are basically work groups, and as such they use the problem-solving process—definition of problem; designation of purpose and setting of goals, tasks, and roles; selection of intervention from among a variety of possible alternatives; ongoing evaluation and revision; and finally, termination (see Figure 10.5). Teams are usually set up because a problem exists or it is known that one will exist. Because teams must be accountable to the community or institution that sponsors them and because team members' decisions as to problem and solution may not always coincide, their problems with both internal and external communication may be acute. It is necessary to be very clear about what is happening both within the team and between it and its environment.

A team can be as small in number as two people, but the dynamics are the same. Such teams are presently being used in home-based family service, where the purpose is to stabilize the family system and empower the parents to do for themselves. Consisting of a paraprofessional and a professional with a master's degree in social work, the team may be assigned by the court to prevent the placement of children outside the home.



Such a team was assigned by the judge to work with Marilyn, a 20-year-old single parent of Sean, age 4, and an infant, Linda. She had been reported to Protective Services for leaving the children alone in the home in the evening. Acting as home builders, the team would be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for a period of six weeks, at the end of which time there would be further evaluation of the situation. The role of the paraprofessional was to help Marilyn deal with the nitty-gritty of homemaking—housekeeping, childcare, use of money. The social worker's task was to see that the necessary resources were available, but primarily to work with Marilyn in helping her deal with feelings of despair and a poor self-image.

Sean was born when Marilyn was only 16 and still in high school. His father, Tony, was also a student, and he and Marilyn had planned to marry when they graduated. He remained with his parents and Marilyn stayed with hers, although her family situation was difficult. After graduation they decided against marriage; Tony went on to the university, and Marilyn moved into a place of her own and



**FIGURE 10.5** Steps in the problem-solving process of a human service team.

found a job as a waitress, and Sean went into daycare. With some supplementation she managed fairly well, but when Linda was born as the result of a casual relationship, she was personally devastated and unable to cope. She felt that she was trapped in an impossible situation, that there was no hope of any change, and that though she loved her children she just could not seem to manage. Lonely and frustrated, she began to go out to a local bar after the children were asleep and was reported by the neighbors.

In such a situation, clarity of role definition by the two team members and constant communication between them would be essential. It would be natural for Marilyn to share her fears and frustrations with the paraprofessional as they shopped or house-cleaned together or to discuss her homemaking frustrations with the counselor, but the result would be constructive as long as both were clear as to the purpose of their intervention, the goals of each as an individual worker and team goals, and their roles and the way they carried them out.

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## *A Yardstick for Team Analysis*

Each team—like each person—is unique and individual. We can, however, generalize to the extent of pinpointing vital areas in the life space of all teams that determine the success or failure of the teamwork. Each team must be able to answer certain questions as they apply to the team's unique self. Each must be prepared to devote time and energy throughout its life span to keeping the answers up to date.

### **I. Purpose**

- A. What is the overall purpose of this team?
- B. Who defines it?
- C. Is there common understanding and agreement regarding its meaning among the various systems and individuals involved?
- D. What is required to implement its purpose?
- E. What is required to change it?
- F. Do the working goals grow naturally out of it?

### **II. Composition and Structure**

- A. Who makes up this team?
- B. How is this decided?
- C. How are both original and additional members selected and involved?
- D. How is membership changed?
- E. What provision is made to enable the individual to become a team member?
- F. How are the roles of the team members defined?
- G. How is the effectiveness of both their uniqueness and their complementarity assessed?

### **III. Internal System**

- A. What is the underlying value system of this team?
- B. How does this team work to include and/or exclude a member?



## Summary

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As awareness of the dynamics of group processes increases, so does our use of groups as media for delivery of human services, both directly with clients and indirectly in work with colleagues. Groups extend our reach in the development and use of knowledge and in the variety of practice skills available. Workers who use groups need to be aware of not only their complexity and possible problems entailed, but also the values that can be derived from that use.

### SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENTS

1. Assign a research paper on the use of groups as media for dealing with human problems. Students may opt to research groups in general or a particular kind of group.
2. Assign students to keep a journal during the semester of any group to which they belong (learning, recreation, therapy, support, etc.), wherein they will assess the ongoing dynamics of this group.
3. Break the class up into groups of six people, and assign them to create a team designed to deal with a current problem affecting them. Each group should have a different problem—such things as parking on campus, class attendance, combining work and school, finding childcare, or the like. An observer will report to the class on what happens in the team using the Yardstick for Team Analysis as a basis for observation.

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### SELECTED RELATED WEBSITES

**American Group Psychotherapy Association**

<http://www.agpa.org/>

**Group Psychotherapy Resource Guide**

<http://www.group-psychotherapy.com/index.htm>