



328en21

21**GROUP PROCESSES**

Human life primarily depends on various kinds of groups. After we are born we remain dependent upon fellow human beings to achieve various goals. We spend most of our time interacting with people. A child is born in a family, goes to school and makes friends. An adult works in an organization, looks after the needs of family members and indulges in various kinds of activities in relation to other persons. His/her interaction with different types of people is to a large extent determined by the type of group, and the context in which the interaction takes place. In this lesson you will be learning about the nature of group, the processes involved in group formation and advantages and disadvantages of being a group member.

**OBJECTIVES**

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the concept of group;
- understand the functioning of groups;
- explain the nature of group processes;
- discuss various stages in group formation;
- describe types of group; and
- discuss effect of group on individual's behaviour.

21.1 THE NATURE OF GROUP

When two or more persons interact, we say that a group has come into existence. The reasons for interaction among persons and forming social relationships are



many. For example, students might interact to collaborate for their studies outside the classroom. Others might interact as they live at one place and share a common goal. They may want to play together and fulfill the need for companionship. Some people might meet by chance but continue to interact because they find each other's company mutually rewarding. Thus it is clear that each group strives to achieve a goal. The more explicit a goal is, the greater the interaction and cooperation among the group members. The relationship among group members remains stable or continues for some time (months, or years). The group also has a structure and members think that they are part of a group or have a feeling of belongingness.

At the physical level any collectivity with a purpose can be called a group.

A class of fifth grade children is a group, a committee of bank officials is a group, two carpenters manning a saw to cut a large piece of timber form a group, and a team playing football is also a group, and so on. All these groups exist at the physical level and have direct or face to face interaction. In these groups direct and immediate communication among the members of group is possible and usually takes place.

Persons possessing certain common characteristics, too, are conceived to form a group.

For example, all Sikh students in a class may be conceived to form a group; all left-handed students in the small class form another set; all elements in the set possess at least one common characteristic which non-members may lack. There need not be any face-to-face communication among the members in such sets. One member may not necessarily know another member.

Thus, it may be said that a group comprises of two or more persons who interact and share common goals. They have stable relationship and are interdependent and perceive themselves as belonging to this collectivity.

The most important characteristic of a group is interdependence. It may be related to behaviours and outcomes tasks. Let us examine three types of interdependencies:

- (i) **The interdependence of behaviour** refers to the fact that the behaviour of one member gives rise to another member's behaviour and which in turn forces the entire group to perform certain functions.
- (ii) **The interdependence of outcome** refers to the fact that each member's outcome (received reward) is not the result of his/her behaviour alone but is also dependent upon the behaviour of other group members. For example, while walking on a road, you are safe till someone hits you from the back or the front side. It also implies shared fate, that is, the outcome of an event has more or less equal implications for the welfare of every member of the group.



- (iii) **Task interdependence** refers to the fact that to achieve a goal, group members need to coordinate their activities. For example, in playing football or cricket, coordination of activities of different players is essential for winning the game. They work on the basis of the principle of complementarity.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.1

1. Define a group?
2. What is the most important characteristic of a group?

21.2 HOW GROUPS OPERATE?

Whenever a group is organized or formed it functions on the basis of certain norms. Also, the group members perform different roles. They also vary in status. Finally, a group may be highly integrated and members may share cohesiveness or may lack it. It will be good if we are clear about these aspects of group functioning.

- (a) **Roles:** In any group different members are required to perform different roles. You will recollect that in various associations we get people who occupy the roles of president, secretary, treasurer etc. All of them perform different roles which help achieving group goals.
- (b) **Norms:** Each group functions according to certain rules. These rules constitute the norms. They may be explicit or implicit and regulate the behaviours of group members. It is expected that members must accept the norms
- (c) **Status:** The different roles carry a specific rank or standing in the group. This standing is related to nature of task assigned and power to influence decision making. Thus status differences emerge in the group.

21.3 THE NATURE OF GROUP PROCESSES

After knowing the nature of a group, you may be interested in knowing why people join groups, how groups are formed, and what are the experiences of joining a group. Let us examine these questions in some detail.

Reasons for Joining the Group

People often join a group primarily for the reason that it enables them to receive certain benefits or need satisfaction. They often extend opportunity to achieve certain desired goals. For example, a football player would like to be a member of



the football team as it would enable him to play football. A group can be helpful to individual in at least four ways:

- (i) People join a group because **groups help to achieve those goals that one cannot attain individually**. For example, you join a group because your friend or teacher is a member of the group.
- (ii) You join a group because you feel that the **group members have resources** (economic or otherwise) which can at times be helpful to you.
- (iii) People often join a group to **meet the need for security**. People get protection when they become members of particular groups.
- (iv) Groups help to **provide positive social identity** to its members. People who are members of various groups tend to have a positive feeling and positive self appreciation simply because of being members of that group.

In brief people join groups because groups help achieving goals, have resources, meet the need for securities and provide social identity.

Outcome of Group Experiences: Cohesiveness

A number of outcomes occur when people come together over a period of time. For example, being a member of group provides satisfaction to the group member. We all feel proud of being an Indian, or studying in a particular school, or working with a particular organization. Thus, a sense of satisfaction leads to cohesiveness in the group. A cohesive group has a higher level of solidarity and consensus. There are forces in the structure of the group that act on the members to remain in the group.

21.4 STAGES IN GROUP FORMATION

The formation of group follows four stages. These are: (a) orientation (b) focus (c) regulation and (d) formalization. Let us learn more about the important features of these stages:

Stage 1 – Orientation

In the initial stage of group formation, the potential or would be members make an attempt to assess their gains and losses for working together and interacting over a period of time. At this stage people judge about their potentialities and the goals of the group. They become more concerned about their benefits or losses while joining a particular group. People spend much time in asking and answering questions about one another's interest, abilities and knowledge etc.



Notes

Stage 2 – Focus

When an individual decides that it is in their interest to form a group to achieve a specific goal, their focus gets centred on the means (or how) to achieve the goal. At this point the members become clear about their contribution to achieve the group goal, the other available resources, and the likely benefits to be received by the members of that group.

Stage 3 – Regulation

Due to interaction over a longer period of time, a pattern in the social exchange of the group members emerges. The roles and functions of each member are clearly defined. It is at this stage that one member becomes the leader of the group and starts playing a decisive role in shaping the activities of the group. Other members look forward to that leader for guidance.

Stage 4 – Formalization

During this phase, the norms and roles that emerge during the third stage become formalized. Members of the group, either in writing or in their speech, acknowledge the existence of these rules and show their willingness to comply with them.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.2

1. Why do people join groups?
2. Name the four stages in formation of a group.

21.5 TYPES OF GROUPS

There are generally two types of groups:

- (i) Primary groups
- (ii) Secondary groups

Primary groups are characterized by more or less continued, intimate, face-to-face association and cooperation. The most important example of primary group is the family, where one can observe close, face-to-face interaction in family. The members of a primary group have a common fate. Primary group is the nucleus of all social organizations. Such groups exert profound influence on shaping the personality of children.

Secondary groups, in contrast, are special interest groups. For example, membership to these groups is voluntary. One may be a member of a professional



group such as doctors, engineers, teachers, artists and so forth. The members of these groups do not necessarily have face-to-face contact although there may be direct interaction among them.

People become members of a secondary group to satisfy their psychological needs such as prestige, companionship, etc. When their needs are satisfied by the group, the individuals take on the secondary groups attitudes more readily than they might otherwise.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.3

1. What are the two types of groups?
2. Give an example of a secondary group.

21.6 EFFECTS OF GROUP ON INDIVIDUAL'S BEHAVIOUR

Becoming a member of a group on the part of an individual appears to influence his or her behaviours in many ways. Let us examine some of the important influences in detail.

Decision Making

It has been found that while taking decisions an individual, when left alone, takes less risk. On the other hand, when he or she is present in a group, there appears a tendency on the part of an individual to take greater amount of risk. The group as a whole takes greater risk than the individual. This phenomenon is popularly known as *risky shift*.

The question then arises as to why groups take greater risk than individuals? It is believed that it is due to the spread of responsibility. The fact that there are others to share the blame if failure occurs makes each group member feel lesser degree of personal blame for a possible failure. The risky shift also results in part from persuasive communication. If most members of a group agree that risk is the correct response to the problem under consideration, then most of the reasons and justifications brought out in the discussion shall favour risk.

Social Facilitation

Social facilitation refers to the influence of the presence of others persons on one's performance. Try to recall your own behaviour. When you are performing



an easy task or something which you know very well, there is a possibility that other group members such as parents or teachers will evaluate your work, and you try to show your best performance. On the other hand, such awareness interferes with your ability to perform when the task is complex and your performance decreases.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.4

1. Why does a group take greater risk than an individual?
2. What is social facilitation effect?



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Persons possessing certain characteristics with a common goal often form a group.
- A group is a subpopulation within a large population with which individuals may be identified as included and belonging to it.
- Interdependence is an important characteristic of a group. It means that the behaviour of one member gives rise to another member's behaviour, which results in forcing the group to perform in certain ways.
- People join groups for different reasons because groups are beneficial and group members have resources and responsibilities which can be shared.
- Cohesiveness refers to the belief of the individuals that being a member of a particular-group would be rewarding.
- The formation of a group follows four stages, which include orientation, focus, regulation and formalization.
- There are two types of groups : Primary and Secondary.
- Group formation has an effect on individual's behaviour like decision making and performance.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Define a group.
2. List down the characteristics of a group.
3. Describe briefly the four stages in the evolution of groups?



4. How does being part of a group affects individual behaviour?



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

21.1

1. When two or more people interact for achieving a common goal, a group comes into existence.
2. interdependence

21.2

1. People join groups because groups:
 - help achieving goals
 - have resources
 - meet the need for securitz
 - provide social identity
2. Orientation, Focus, Regulation, Formalization

21.3

1. Primary groups and Secondary groups.
2. Association of teachers

21.4

1. Because in groups there are others to share the blame if failure occurs.
2. When an individual's performance improves due to the presence of other people, it is called social facilitation.

HINTS TO TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Refer to section 21.1
2. Refer to section 21.1
3. Refer to section 21.4
4. Refer to section 21.6