Group Process Dynamics Exercise: Assignment

Suggested Ground Rules

First, and most important, we suggest that you keep all comments and discussion centered around one central issue: how can we improve the effective functioning of our group? During your discussion, we encourage you to keep coming back to the question: is this going to be relevant and helpful to improving the functioning of our group? The point is not to dwell on the past or to point fingers, but to figure out how to move forward into the future as a better performing group than you’ve been, up to this point. The aim is not to accuse or blame; the aim is to improve. Conversely, the point is not to simply pat yourself on the back and say, “We’re doing great; there’s nothing to work on.” You can always improve the functioning of a group, and the aim here is to figure out how to improve. If your group is already highly functional, that is great. Now figure out how to make it better. Second, for the exercise to be most helpful to you, we’d like to ask that you adhere to the structure of the exercise – follow the instructions step by step. Thanks and good luck!

Steps

1. Decide as a group if you accept the ground rules. Also, decide if you want to add any other ground rules for yourselves. As a group, fill out the attached GROUP PROCESS ANALYSIS SUMMARY SCORE SHEET.

2. Take a few minutes to note what you do well as a group. Agree as a group on three highly functional aspects of the group – good things about the group’s functioning that you want to be sure to preserve. Write these down under the heading “Highly Functional Aspects of the Group.”

3. Have each person in the group tell each of the other members in the group at least one aspect of them they see as being helpful to the functioning of the group. Write these down under the heading “Individual Strengths.”

4. Based on filling out the GROUP PROCESS ANALYSIS SUMMARY SCORE SHEET, agree as a group on the group’s three most pressing areas for improvement. We suggest that you use the group average scores as a guide, but not necessarily an absolute criteria, for selecting the three areas.

5. After you’ve agreed on the group’s three most pressing areas for improvement, discuss and determine as a group what can be done to improve the functioning of the group. Concentrate your discussion on the three most pressing areas for improvement.
   - Come up with at least two systematic solutions the group intends to implement to improve its functioning. Write these down under the heading “Possibilities for Improvement: Systemic.”
   - Come up with at least one thing that each individual can do to improve the functioning of the group. Write these down under the heading “Possibilities for Improvement: Individual.” (Note: this would be an ideal time to ask other group members what they noted as your “not helpful” aspects.)

6. Take five minutes of quiet time for each individual in the group to come up with at least one specific thing they will personally commit to doing in order to improve the functioning of the group (each person must come up with his or her own specifics; this is to be a self-generated commitment). Now each person should read his or her commitment to the group (“I commit to…”). Write these commitments down under the heading “Personal Commitments.”

7. Create a summary document (just one per group) containing the items below. Send a copy of the summary document to each member of the group. Send the summary document to the teaching team before the beginning of our next class session.
   - “Highly Functional Aspects of the Group”
   - “Individual Strengths”
   - Your group’s three selected areas most in need of improvement.
   - “Possibilities for Improvement: Systemic”
   - “Possibilities for Improvement: Individual”
   - “Personal Commitments”

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Group Process Analysis Summary Score Sheet

GROUP MEMBERS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category #1</th>
<th>Group High Score: ___ Group Low Score: ___ Group Average Score: ___</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category #2</td>
<td>Group High Score: ___ Group Low Score: ___ Group Average Score: ___</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category #3</td>
<td>Group High Score: ___ Group Low Score: ___ Group Average Score: ___</td>
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<td>Category #4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Category #11</td>
<td>Group High Score: ___ Group Low Score: ___ Group Average Score: ___</td>
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Group Average Score Across All Categories: ________________
Number & Name of Group: ___________________________

**Group Process Evaluation Sheet**

1. There is a clear unity of purpose. There was free discussion of the objectives until members could commit themselves to them; the objectives are meaningful to each group member.  
   - 5 4 3 2 1  
   - There is low unity of purpose – little or no evidence that the group is widely committed to common objectives or that the objectives are meaningful to each member of the group.

2. The group is self-conscious about its own operations. The group has taken time to explicitly discuss group process – how the group will function to achieve its objectives. The group has a clear, explicit, and mutually agreed-upon approach: mechanics, norms, expectations, rules, etc. Frequently, it will stop to examine how well it is doing or what may be interfering with its operation. Whatever the problem may be, it gets open discussion and a solution found.  
   - 5 4 3 2 1  
   - The group tends to avoid discussion of its own maintenance. The group has taken little time to explicitly discuss group process – how the group will function to achieve its objectives. The group does not have a clear, mutually agreed-upon approach: mechanics, norms, expectations, rules, etc. There is often much discussion after a meeting of what was wrong and why, but this is seldom discussed within the meeting itself.

3. The group has set clear and demanding performance goals for itself and has translated these performance goals into well-defined concrete milestones against which it measures itself. The group defines and achieves a continuous series of “small wins” along the way to larger goals.  
   - 5 4 3 2 1  
   - The group has low or ambiguous performance goals for itself. It has not defined concrete milestones against which it measures itself. The group has not given itself the stimulus of a continuous series of “small wins” along the way to larger goals.

4. The atmosphere tends to be informal, comfortable, relaxed. There are no obvious tensions, a working atmosphere in which people are involved & interested.  
   - 5 4 3 2 1  
   - The atmosphere is likely to reflect either indifference (lots of side conversations, whispering, etc.), boredom, or tension. The group is not genuinely engaged.

5. There is a lot of discussion in which virtually everyone participates, but it remains pertinent to the purpose of the group. If discussion gets off track, someone will bring it back in short order. The members listen to each other. Every idea is given a hearing. People are not afraid of being foolish by putting forth a creative thought even if it seems extreme.  
   - 5 4 3 2 1  
   - A few people tend to dominate. Sometimes their contributions are way off the point, but little is done by anyone in the group to keep the group clearly on track. People do not really listen to each other. Ideas are ignored or overridden. Conversations after group meetings reveal that people failed to express ideas or feelings.

6. People are free in expressing their feelings as well as their ideas.  
   - 5 4 3 2 1  
   - Personal feelings are hidden. There is fear that these are too explosive if brought out.
There is disagreement and this is viewed as good. Disagreements are not suppressed or overridden by premature group action. The reasons are carefully examined, and the group seeks to resolve them rather than dominate the dissenter. Dissenters are not trying to dominate the group; they have a genuine difference of opinion. If there are basic disagreements that cannot be resolved, the group figures out a way to live with them without letting them block its efforts.

Most decisions are made at a point where there is general agreement. However, those who disagree with the general agreement of the group do not keep their opposition private and let an apparent consensus mask their disagreement. The group does not accept a simple majority as a proper basis for action.

Each individual carries his or her own weight, meeting or exceeding the expectations of other group members. Each individual is respectful of the mechanics of the group: arriving on time, coming to meetings prepared, completing agreed upon tasks on time, etc. When action is taken, clear assignments are made (who-what-when) and willingly accepted and completed by each group member.

Criticism is frequent, frank, and relatively comfortable. The criticism has a constructive flavor – oriented toward removing an obstacle that faces the group.

The leadership of the group shifts from time to time. The issue is not who controls, but how to get the job done.

Disagreements are not generally dealt with effectively by the group. They may be suppressed by those who fear conflict, or there may be a “Tyranny of the Minority” in which an individual or subgroup is so aggressive that the majority accedes to their wishes in order to preserve the peace.

Actions are often taken prematurely before the real issues are either examined or resolved. There is sometimes grousing after the meeting. A simple majority is considered sufficient, and the minority is expected to go along. The minority remains resentful and uncommitted.

There are one or more group members who do not carry their fair share, failing to meet expectations of other group members. One or more members are disrespectful of the mechanics of the group: arriving late, coming unprepared, not completing agreed upon tasks on time, etc. Action steps are either unclear (who-what-when) or some group members are unwilling to accept and complete action steps at an equal level to other group members.

Criticism may be present, but it is tension-producing or hostile. Some people avoid giving constructive criticism.

There is dominant figure in the group who seeks to gain and retain power in the group.

Sources: The Human Side of Enterprise by MacGregor and The Wisdom of Teams by Katzenbach and Smith.