The Group Book:
Effective Skills for Cooperative Groups

Participant Workbook

This workbook is for learning group concepts, skills and strategies

Maurice L. Phipps and Cindy A. Phipps

The Group Book:
Effective Skills for Cooperative Groups
by Maurice L.Phipps and Cindy A. Phipps

**Order the complete book from the publisher
Booklocker.com**

https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/8753.html?s=pdf
**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

The Group Book:
Effective Skills for Cooperative Groups

Participant Workbook

Maurice L. Phipps and Cindy A. Phipps

DISCLAIMER

This book details the authors' personal experiences with and opinions about facilitating and working in groups. The co-author is a working school psychologist but is not licensed for private practice. The other co-author is a professor and researcher in cooperative learning.

The authors and publisher are providing this book and its contents on an "as is" basis and make no representations or warranties of any kind with respect to this book or its contents. The authors and publisher disclaim all such representations and warranties, including for example specific advice for a particular purpose. In addition, the authors and publisher do not represent or warrant that the information accessible via this book is accurate, complete or current.

Except as specifically stated in this book, neither the authors or publisher, nor any authors, contributors, or other representatives will be liable for damages arising out of or in connection with the use of this book. This is a comprehensive limitation of liability that applies to all damages of any kind, including (without limitation) compensatory; direct, indirect or consequential damages; loss of data, income or profit; loss of or damage to property and claims of third parties.

You understand that this book is not intended as a substitute for consultation with a licensed professional. Before you begin any change of your lifestyle in any way, you will consult a licensed professional to ensure that you are doing what's best for your situation.

This book provides content related to facilitation and group work topics. As such, use of this book implies your acceptance of this disclaimer.

Table of Contents

THE GROUP BOOK
Effective Skills for Cooperative Groups

Introduction

So you got put in a group again! Was your last group a good experience or something you don't want to repeat? Did you all pull together or did you have free riders?   You might have been on-line with your project team and have been surprised at the sudden decline in civility. You probably ask, *"For goodness sake, why can't we just do individual work and get an individual grade?"* Several things might have sprung to mind for you when your instructor explained the group requirements for your course. *"Is this professor trying to get out of teaching by using group work?"*   *"I've got good grades on my own in the past and the last thing I want is to have to rely on somebody else for a grade."* Of course, if you never have exactly been classed as an academic overachiever you might be thinking, *"Yes! I'll just get in that brainy-looking-kid-in-the-front-row's group and I'll be coasting."*

The truth is that preparation for classes using group work is usually more extensive for the instructors than if they simply prepared straight lectures for memorization. If you are a student looking for maximum learning, then you will want to know that much of the current thinking and research points to the fact that student learning is more effective done through cooperative learning techniques.

If you are looking for a free ride, you may find your group prepared to challenge you to be a functional group member and this may be the most rewarding class in your academic career.

Why are groups important?
- When functional, groups produce a better quality product (the key word here is *functional).*
- Being part of a team (as opposed to just a group) can be a very satisfying experience.
- You only learn functional group skills by practicing them -- in a group.

When you leave college and get into work situations, unless you are the Maytag repairman, you will be part of some kind of project **team,** committee, etc., (hopefully, not just a group). You will **not** be asked to sit at your own desk and not talk to anyone and be expected to just listen and memorize. **This will not happen.** You will be given a project and be expected to use all the resources you can to do the best job you can. Now this means using other people - - a group! *"Aaahh"!* You might say. But with the practice that you got in school and college, working cooperatively with your fellow classmates using this book, your group will progress to become a team!

Whew! Better to learn all those functional group skills now than on your first job.
Also, when you are asked the question, *"What kind of team player are you?"* at your job interview, you will be able to respond in detail and explain how teams are made and maintained because most people 'in the know' realize that they don't just happen. A team is trained and skilled.

What do I need to know about groups and teams?
        There are endless books and tons of research on this topic, but we suggest for your work at school or college the following concepts and skills will get the cooperation and collaboration going, maintain it, and enable you to more enjoy your project teams.

Concepts
        There are several concepts that need to be understood to enable high functioning teams.
They are listed below, and explained more fully throughout this book.
        Cooperative Learning is a method of learning in groups. It requires that you integrate five principles into your group work -- positive interdependency, face to face promotive interaction, individual accountability and personal responsibility, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing.
   *Group development* - - groups progress through stages to get to be a team.
        Leadership - - everyone can exhibit leadership roles in the group; you are all going to be leaders pulling and pushing each other along using some definite skills and tactics. Leadership can be distributed amongst the group.
        Cooperation and conflict are the two sides of the same coin - - one has to be learned with the other.
        Group dynamics can be complex, but an understanding of group dynamics can remove the worries of what you might perceive to be "weird" behavior in groups.

        "Other directedness" is a frame of mind enabling you to do what you can do for others. Everyone likes the "other directed" person and this can lead to promotion in the work place and definitely makes for effective team building and maintenance.
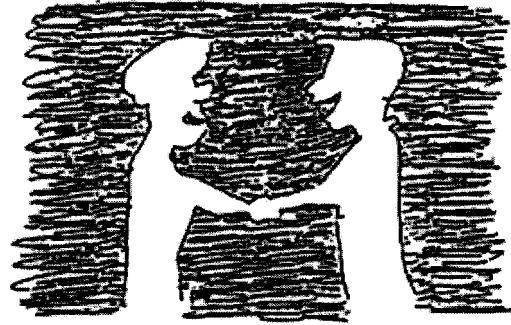
Skills and Roles

Communication skills, sometimes referred to as social skills or people skills, are what are required to move the group along to team status and keep it there.

Leadership skills are included here too, but we use a different definition than you may be familiar with. In Distributed Actions Leadership Theory, everyone is expected to keep the group moving forward by using facilitation skills. Roles that are practiced in the group can be either functional or dysfunctional. Everyone practicing the functional roles distributes the leadership skills around giving everyone responsibility for group building and group maintenance as well as tasks. Cohesive groups, where people in the group function well together don't just happen. Specific actions are usually necessary to build cohesion and eventually interdependence. Interdependence is where personal issues have been pretty much resolved and the group can function on the task at hand most efficiently, recognizing each other's strengths and weaknesses in non-judgmental ways. Also, the group will not stay cohesive without continued work on the group process to maintain this position. Keeping an eye out for dysfunctional behavior and confronting it helps maintain a positive communication climate.

Tactics and Strategies

A strategy would be to agree on using distributed leadership; tactics might include using techniques like:

- Establishing clear *goals* - - there might be different perceptions of what the goals of a project are, so clarifying this immediately is important.
- Setting *expected behaviors* in the group - - expected behaviors in a group are called group norms. You can set these at the outset by discussing the behaviors that you want to happen and ones that you prefer not to happen. Norms will emerge and if they happen to be undesirable, are usually more difficult to correct. In the case of norms, prevention is often easier than trying to change emergent behaviors. Professors and teachers can refer to more detailed information on this by reading the article, Group Norm Setting (Phipps and Phipps, 2003).
- Deciding on *consensus* rather than majority vote - - Roberts' Rules of Order have their place especially in committees that may include lots of politics and 'turf' issues. In such cases to make any kind of progress, voting is often necessary. In a project team, where the group is often together for a fixed amount of time and where creativity and ownership are more important, then cutting some group members out of decisions using a vote could be too divisive. Subsequently, reaching cohesion and interdependence would be difficult for the team. However, if a vote is not to be taken, then skills in mediation and conflict resolution become very important. If no one in your group can compromise, then you will not be able to move forward to be that high functioning cooperative group where the members are not only cohesive, but are interdependent. Don't forget that interdependency means that all the team members are working together using each other's

strengths while focusing on the task. This is done in such a way that the process is effective and enjoyable. Getting to this point requires practicing good group skills to enable all individuals to maintain ownership in the project.

•   *Processing* refers to *how* the group is functioning. This is often neglected in groups as many groups focus only on the tasks needed to achieve the project goals. If, however, the process is neglected and relationships begin to deteriorate, then the task will quickly follow downhill. So you need to look at how you are working. What is going well? What can be improved? Make continual adjustments.

   Decision-making and *problem solving* can be complex, so break the problems and decisions down to more simplified steps or divide the process of problem solving into different categories. This is especially important when you are trying to integrate critical thinking to fulfill your goals.

   PERT method of planning - - PERT stands for Program Evaluation and Review Technique. It was developed to build nuclear submarines. Now your projects aren't that complex, but any project being tackled by a group is complex, so a simplified version of PERT can help you to plan the stages that you need to complete. It also helps the team process as you see the plan visually unfold and become aware of what steps, if not completed, would hold up the whole project.

   The following workbook will explain the above concepts more fully and give work sheets to plan strategies to assist your group in its mission to accomplish the task you have been set. Use this workbook with your group to work out the strategy for your success. First let us start with getting an understanding of some group and team concepts. Read through parts I and II before you begin working on your strategies.
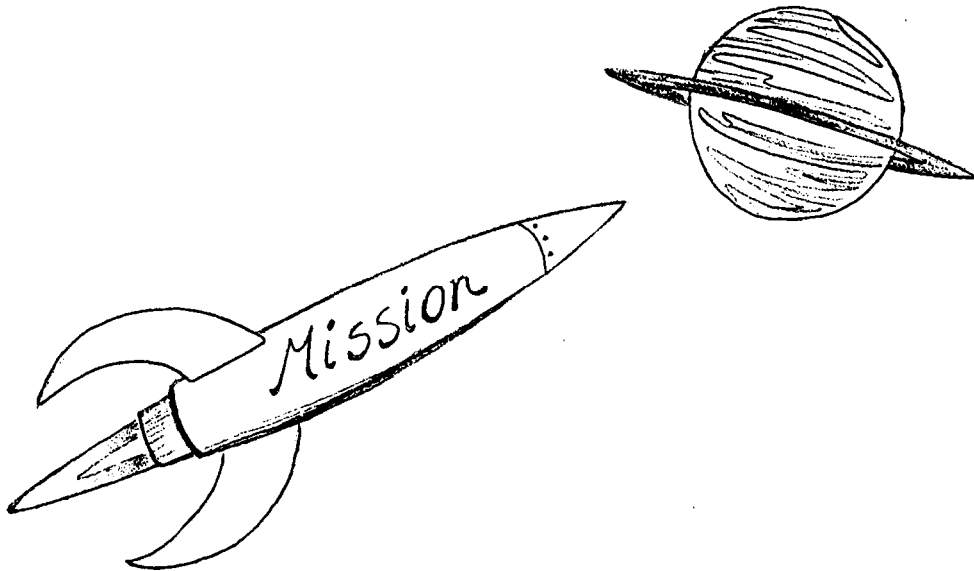
PART I
CONCEPTS
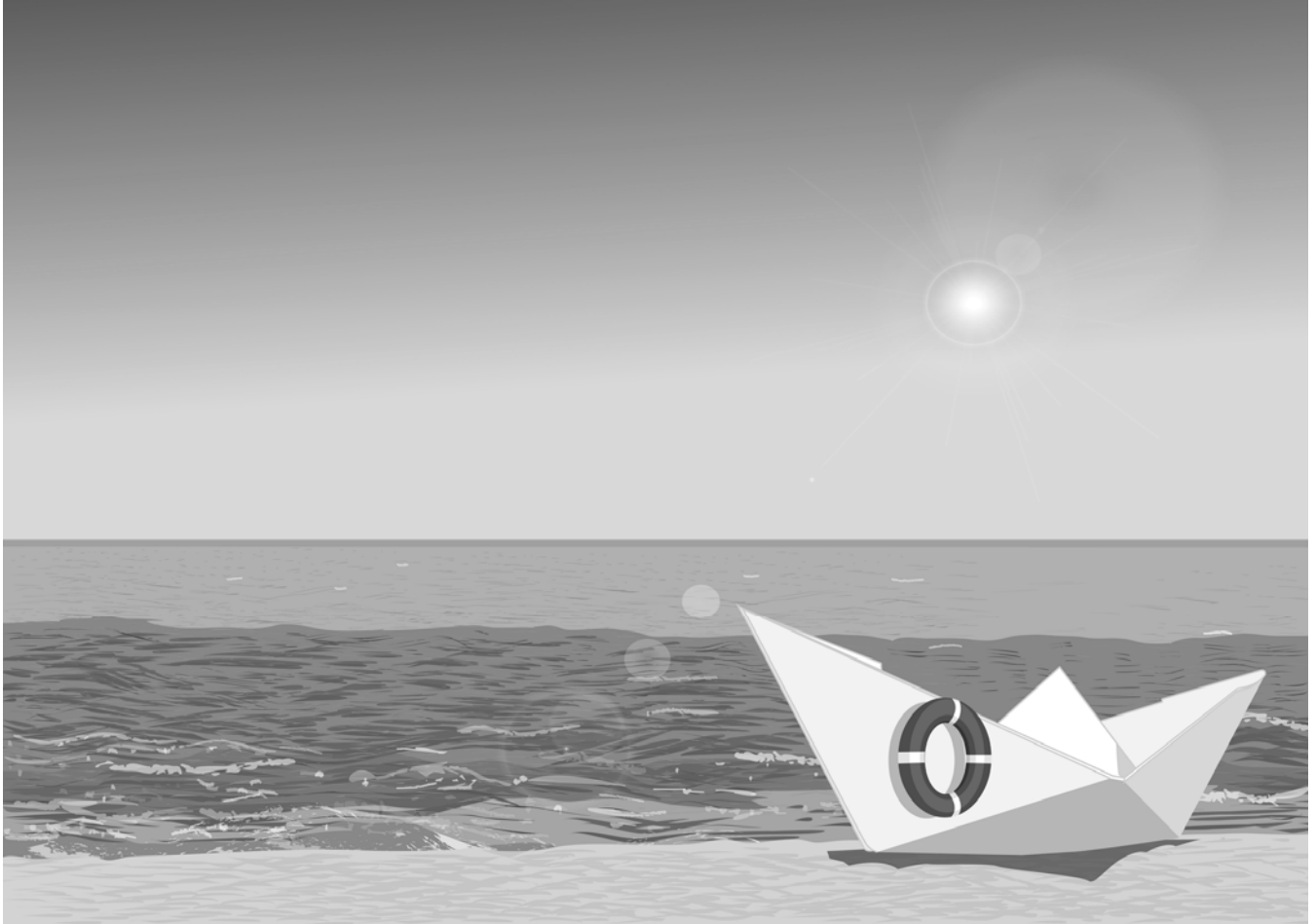
Part One: Concepts

Cooperative Learning

The underlying concept that we would like you to consider for your project team is Cooperative Learning. Your teachers might have structured the five elements of cooperative learning into the course that you are taking. As a group, you need to include these into your planning strategy and group norms. If you don't, then you could have "free riders", frustrating communication blocks, and a multitude of other problems. Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1992), from the Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota describe the five elements of cooperative learning as follows:
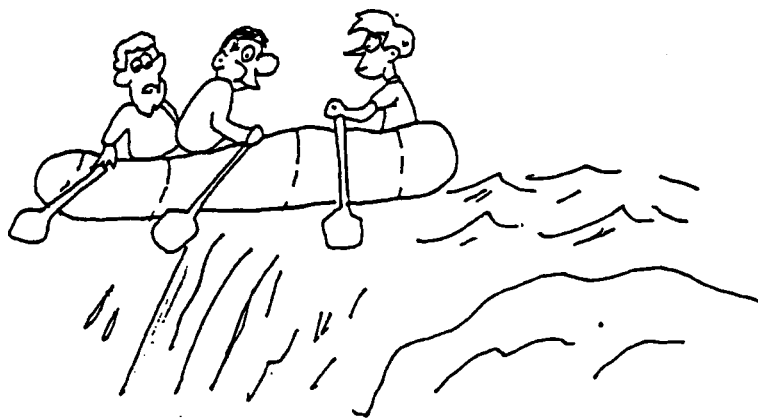
1. Positive Interdependency

As a group you must believe that you will "sink or swim together." The perception must be that one cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds. Each person's efforts benefit all, creating a commitment to other people's success as well as one's own. This may require a real mind set change for the Internet Generation and general "scrappers." Remember the "other directedness" concept. If there is no positive interdependence, there is no cooperation. Positive interdependence is achieved by everyone committing to the group and the project - - and by sharing time, information, and effort as equally as possible.

## 2. Individual and Group Accountability, and Personal Responsibility

Each member must be accountable for contributing a fair share of the work and not "hitch hike." It includes assessing who needs extra assistance, support and encouragement. The truth is that as you provide instruction to a group member who needs it you "cement" your own knowledge. The purpose of using cooperative learning in groups is to help improve all the individuals in that group. A commitment is required to ensure that everyone contributes and understands all the material connected with the project.

3. Face to Face Promotive Interaction

Cooperative Learning groups are both personal and academic support groups. Through interpersonal interactions, cognitive learning is increased. Things like oral explanations, discussions, connections to other learning, testing each other, teaching each other all improve the learning. This fits nicely with the SQ3R method recommended for most effective studying.

Remember - - Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review. Often students without a group find it awkward or silly to recite material to themselves. Yet the actual recitation of the material can be a significant part of learning it. Personal commitment is increased as the group promotes this kind of work together.

4. Interpersonal and Small Group Skills
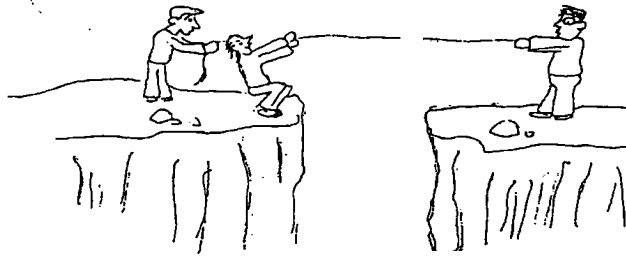
      To get the task accomplished most effectively, groups must function as a team. This requires that all members practice good team skills, which includes effective leadership, decision making, trust building, communication, and conflict management. Everyone must also be *motivated* to use these skills. As a team member, try and think of creative ways that you can motivate your fellows. Strive to practice the team skills detailed in Section II.

5. Group Processing

      Group processing includes discussing how the group is working. How effective are relationships? Are the goals being met and is the task being accomplished? How well? How can the group improve? Is the group standing by the group norms set by the group? What can you do when group norms are ignored or dysfunctional behavior happens?

      For the group to be a high functioning cooperative learning group, **all** of the above five cooperative learning elements need to be included continually in the group strategy. If the group gets the motivation to build in all these elements, then a higher functioning team will grow with more student learning. The most difficult and often most neglected part of cooperative learning are elements 4 and 5. The teacher usually structures elements 1, 2, and 3 through various classroom strategies. Elements 4 and 5 are crucial; so the remainder of this book focuses on these elements - - small group skills and group processing.

Concepts in Team building

      Groups often experience conflict. Feelings become intensified and incidents magnified. This is compounded by a lack of awareness on the part of group members in how their behaviors affect each other and a lack of understanding that **all** groups will experience conflict as part of normal group development.

Group Development

Groups go through an initial period where rules, roles, and rewards are all in flux. Cohesive groups are often noisy, they joke around, have disagreements or arguments and overrun time limits. Non-cohesive groups are often quiet, boring, and apathetic. They seldom disagree and deal quickly with important issues with little discussion.

Tension is always initially present and can be dealt with through smiles, laughs or jokes, or can be dissipated by humor, direct comment, or conciliation. Positive behaviors can be established by being supported and eventually becoming norms. Norms are the common beliefs of the group, which lead to expectations of behavior. They help interactions by specifying the responses that are expected. Norms are best formally established - - through discussion by all group members. This is not necessarily something we are naturally going to do, so it requires a savvy group member to orchestrate it. This could be you.

As groups develop, there is a human component, establishing and maintaining relations, and a task component, the job to be done. Anticipating the kinds of group interaction problems that are predictable enables better facilitation and choice of group role. As the stages of group development are predictable, they can be controlled. For example, good organization and use of distributed leadership skills (functional group roles) can ease the group through the conflict stage. The two dimensions (1) personal relations (interactions) and (2) task functions (what tasks are being done toward completing the project), combine at the different stages of group development. Four stages of development are suggested by Jones (1973) are summarized below.
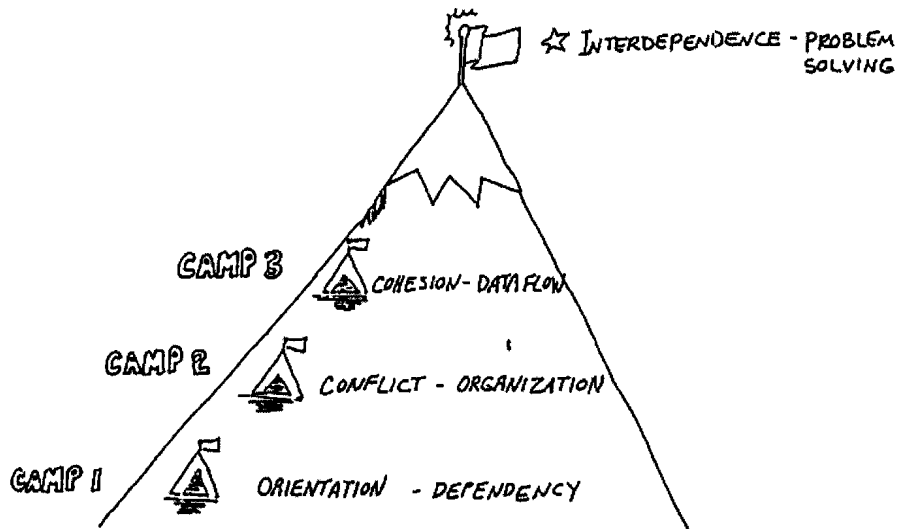
Initially, personal relations show dependency on the leader who sets the ground rules. At this stage the task function is orientation of individuals to the work involved. Individuals will be questioning why they are here, what they are going to do, how it will be done, what the goals will be, and possibly, how little they can get by with doing.

Next, conflict develops in personal relations, and organization emerges as a task function. The conflict may be covert but it is there. Conflicts are normal expectations. In fact, now that you anticipate there will be conflict, you can talk to your group about it before it happens, and plan for how to deal with it. Johnson and Johnson (1975, p. 231) suggested that, "It is not the presence of conflicts that cause disastrous and unfortunate things, it is the harmful and ineffective management of conflicts." Conflicts come from contention for leadership, task, influence and popularity. They are complicated by our own unresolved problems with authority, dependency and rules. At this stage the group has emerged through

orientation and is feeling less dependent on the leader. A desire from the group emerges to organize both tasks and relationships that create conflict as different ideals clash. Here is where your planning and organizing skills will prove invaluable.

If the group resolves the interpersonal conflicts, a sense of being a team is achieved and the cohesion enables data-flow to take place efficiently. Ideas are shared along with feelings, and feedback is given. There is a sharing of information related to task, and people feel good about belonging to the group. There could be a period of play unrelated to the task, an enjoyment of the cohesion. Let the good times roll! Interdependence is not achieved by many groups. Read on for a description of what your group could be like! There is a high commitment to activities related to the common goals.

Experimentation with problem solving is supported and there is collaboration and competition that is functional. Members of the group can interact with each other as a team. They are more than cohesive, they have no fears in sharing points of view as they respect each other's expertise. Divergent thinking is accepted and encouraged within the group. The members are interdependent and not reliant on a specific leader unless the task changes to something unfamiliar. Doesn't interdependence sound worth striving for?

Understanding the developmental stages is useful as a predictor of group behavior. For example, if conflict is expected, then followers will be less anxious when the group starts to experience it.

Leadership
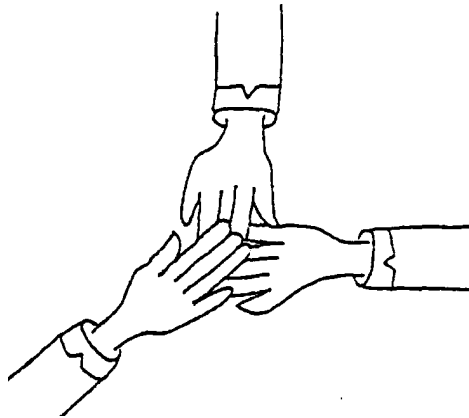
Everyone in the group can practice leadership skills (for details of these skills look under the Skills Section - -part II). Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec, (1992) suggested a Distributed Actions Theory of Leadership - - the idea is that anyone moving the group forward in the task or relationship using a positive group role is actually in a leadership role. Remember, interdependence means <u>not</u> relying on <u>one </u>leader. So you can all practice leadership skills by facilitating task behaviors, group building behaviors, and group maintenance behaviors.

Conflict and Cooperation
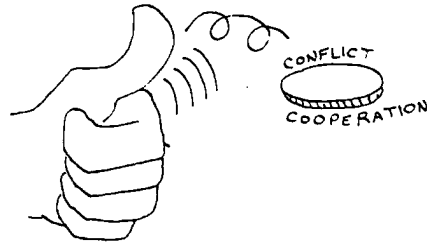
As we are trying to be cooperative in our intentions and as we know that conflict will arise and that this is a normal progression, then we need to understand the usefulness of conflict in learning situations and how to behave in conflict situations. Johnson, Johnson and Smith (1991, p 7:4) state, "Controversy increases the number of ideas, quality of ideas, creation of original ideas, the use of a wider range of ideas, originality of expression in problem solving, more creative solutions, more imaginative solutions, more novel solutions, and the use of more varied strategies." In some cases actually designating a "naysayer" or "devil's advocate" for a particular discussion can be a very positive step. For the skills required, see part II.

Group Dynamics
(Pfeiffer and Jones, 1973)
The group process is the dynamics of what is happening between group members while the group is working on the content or task. Process and content make up all interactions. The group process or "dynamics" is often neglected even when it causes serious problems. As it emerges, it encompasses morale, tone, atmosphere, influence, and participation, style of influence, leadership struggles, conflict, competition, and cooperation. Four areas of group dynamics that would be useful to understand are:

1. Communication
2. Task and group maintenance
3. Emotional issues
4. Cohesion building
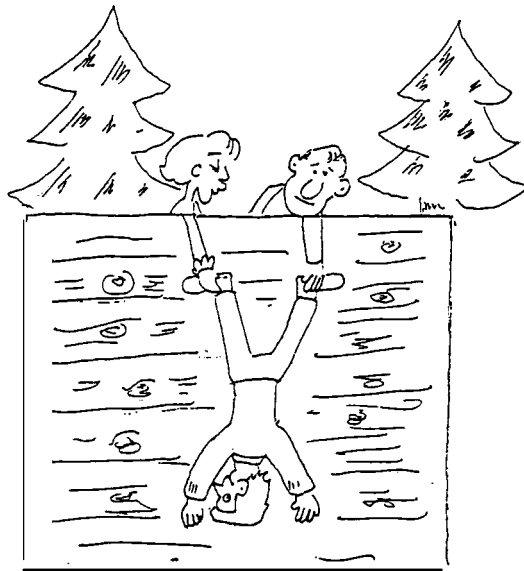
Communication

Without effective communication, a breakdown in the team will ensue. Communication includes getting the message across as intended, but also creating a receptive atmosphere, dealing with conflict, effecting motivation, and using good management techniques. It is obvious that communication is essential, and taking the time to process your communication is equally important. Communication and participation are not necessarily the same. Someone with little participation may still capture the attention of the group, while some may be verbose and ignored. Influence can be positive or negative; it can enlist support or alienate. You know the types of individuals we're talking about!

Communicating feelings is as important as communicating facts. It should be a group norm to be able to express feelings and a good thing to own feelings and not make excuses for them. Refusal to include this kind of information reduces the individual's sense of worth and belonging – it de-motivates, causing bad morale. Expression of feelings may be inhibited, but non-verbal communication is often made through the tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, etc. Active listening is often required involving showing empathy and doing perception checks by re-stating or paraphrasing (see part II skills). This creates trust and an understanding that anxieties are really being considered.

Task and Group Maintenance
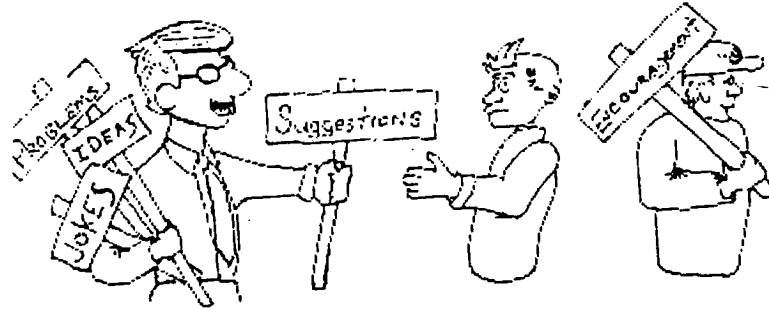
To maintain harmonious working relationships and create a good working atmosphere, these functions are important as they move both the task functions and group relations forward. They include:
Gate keeping (helping others into a discussion or cutting off others)
Clarification of ideas
Evaluating suggestions
Diagnosing problems
Mediating arguments
Relieving tensions (by joking or placing the issue in perspective)
Celebrating good work that has been achieved.

The social aspects of the group involvement should not be underestimated, and the above suggestions help keep the group on an even keel. Group rewards such as pizza or other forms of celebration help instill cohesiveness and commitment to each other.

Emotional Issues

Emotional issues include power struggles, fears, identities, goals, needs, and intimacy. Dependency, fighting, and dominance issues can affect relationships and communication. For example, someone withdrawing emotionally affects the group, and pairing up can have negative consequences. Such issues need to be confronted either openly in front of the whole group or privately on an individual basis, depending on the situation.

Cohesion Building
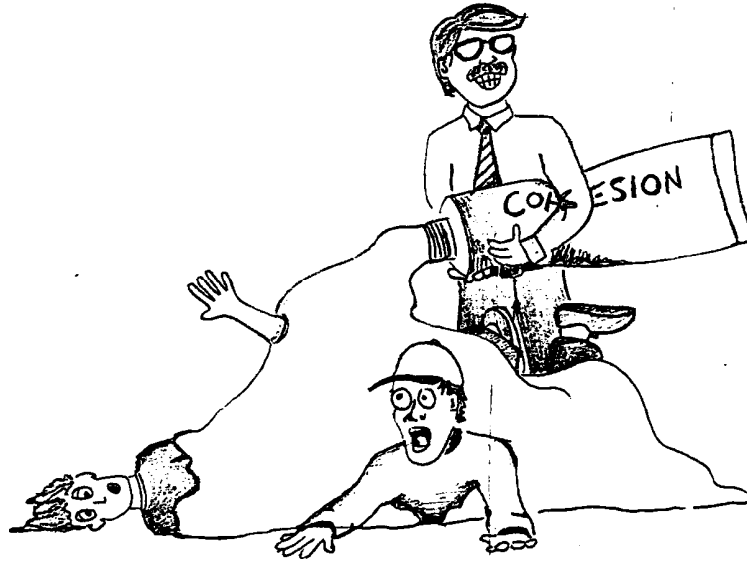
   If the group experiences relationship problems, explain that strong feelings and anger are acceptable, but use these tactics to deal with it:
a.   Stay in the here and now.
b.   Use "I" statements (e.g., I feel).
c.   Keep words congruent with feelings.
d.   Talk directly to group members rather than talk in general terms.

   Make it clear that it is not necessary to justify personal feelings; have an expectation of no back stabbing and everyone model it.

Some techniques to enable cohesion are (Borman and Borman, 1990):
a.   Share stories, this promotes connectedness.
b.   Assign attainable goals
c.   When giving feedback to the group as a whole, give feedback as if the group is a person (see Part II – skills).
d.   Identify personal needs and either meet them or acknowledge the impossibility.

Develop cohesiveness by the following:
a.   Identify we, our, not they or me.
b.   Build a tradition through history, fantasy, and ceremony.
c.   Stress teamwork.
d.   Get the group to recognize good work.
e.   Give group rewards - - verbal, such as praising for meeting group norms; or food such as pizza, etc.
f.   Treat the group as people, not as machines. People have feelings. Always include time (group processing) for people to share their feelings, and make it an expectation rather than have people bury their problems.

An atmosphere is created in the way a group works. Individuals differ in the kind of atmosphere they like. Some prefer it to be congenial; others prefer conflict or competition. It can change from time to time from work, play, satisfaction and sluggishness to enthusiasm.

There can be an air of permissiveness, warmth, or defensiveness. People could be inhibited or spontaneous. The atmosphere is basically up to you as the group members. As you are all using leadership skills and roles, then you have some influence on this. Formally setting norms as a group early, then adhering to them (through regular processing) can also affect the atmosphere positively. An understanding of "defense mechanisms" in groups can help you to understand a group dynamic that alternatively can produce "fight" or "flight" interactions or manipulation of the group by members.

Defense Mechanisms in Groups (Thorenson, 1972)

Defense mechanisms are behaviors motivated by a personal need to maintain one's position in the group. Defense mechanisms evade conflict by moving away (flight) or toward (fight) the source of the conflict, according to Paul Thorenson (1972). His categorization of these defenses applies to any group as conflict often arises along with corresponding defenses.

Fight Defenses
1. Competition with the facilitator: This can be an attempt to build personal ego or avoid dealing with a personal problem.
2. Cynicism: This challenges the group goals through skeptical questioning of genuine behavior.
3. Interrogation: Someone giving heavy questioning may be trying to keep the spotlight away from himself/herself.

Flight Defenses
1. Intellectualization: This is a way of evading giving anything away personally or emotionally. It is sometimes done in introductions to avoid any self-disclosure. Self -disclosure done appropriately cultivates trust; intellectualizing evades giving personal or emotional information. Encouragement of "I" statements should help to discourage this.
2. Generalization: Impersonal statements about group behavior such as "we think" rather than "I think" means the individual may be speaking for the group without the group's consent.
3. Projection: One person's unconscious needs or behaviors projected onto another, he/she attributes to others traits that are unacceptable in him/herself (something one doesn't like about oneself that can be seen in another).
4. Rationalization: This is a substitution of less incriminating reasons to try and justify a decision, feeling, emotion, or statement rather than what is probably the correct one.
5. Withdrawal: Members suddenly falling silent are in flight. Individual confrontation followed possibly by group confrontation is necessary to bring such an individual back into the group.

Group Manipulation Defense
1. Pairing is sub-grouping to gain support.
2. "Red-crossing" is a defense of a person under fire to try and encourage mutual aid.
3. Focusing on one issue enables the group to spend excessive time on a person or issue to keep the action away from where it should be. Generally evasive maneuvering should be confronted using effective feedback techniques.

Another aspect of groups that will help you to achieve that cohesion and interdependence is the concept of creating and maintaining a positive communication climate. Jack Gibb (1961) suggested that the communication climate could develop to be either supportive or defensive.

Communication Climate (Gibb, 1961)

Creating defensiveness is the equivalent to throwing "mud in the works" as opposed to "oiling the machinery." A defensive climate is just much harder to work in, to communicate in, and to be a part of. Much more energy has to be spent to get the same amount of work done. Gibb defined defensive and supportive climates as follows.

A **defensive** climate is:
Evaluative - - the impression of not being good enough is given.
Person Control Oriented - - people are talked about a lot instead of problem solving.
Strategic - - deliberate attempts to distort and be calculating to effect "impression management."
Neutral - indifference is shown to the well being of people in the organization.
Superior Directed - - one-upmanship and putting each other down, discounting of others' ideas.
Dogmatic - - the need to be right all the time by individuals creates rigidity and inflexibility.

A **defensive climate** causes depersonalization, facade building, false role taking, strategic distortion, hostility, circumvention, aggression, and dependence.

A **supportive** climate is:
Descriptive - - people are non-judgmental.
Problem Control Oriented - - problem solving is the focus rather than people control.
Spontaneous - - there are no hidden agendas (ulterior motives) affecting behaviors.
Empathic - there is an expressed concern for the well-being of others. Support is communicated. There is a willingness to take the perspective of others.
Equally Directed - -There is mutual trust, and respect for each other is shown.
Egalitarian - - there is social equality.

Checking the Group Climate

Checking the group climate is part of processing and can be done using either of the two worksheets in the Tactics and Strategies Section. Worksheet X can be used to focus information for discussions on how support is being achieved or how defensiveness is caused.

Alternately, if you want to know in depth what is happening in the group and you wish to measure more accurately which aspects of the group dynamics are dysfunctional and why, then you could use the Group Dynamics Questionnaire (Worksheet XI).

The Group Dynamics Questionnaire (GDQ) was developed to measure group climate. The GDQ (Phipps, 1986, 1992) measures task and relationship functions as well as the following aspects of group dynamics:

Goals and Objectives
Communication, Atmosphere and Climate Participation
Group Interaction and Social Control Role Structure
Cohesiveness Leadership

After completion, the questionnaire can be just "eye-balled" for information, or statistically analyzed depending on how precise you want to get your information.

Other Directedness

Working as a team member sometimes requires sacrificing personal goals. Leaders who gain respect from group members are often the ones who are selfless and willing to support all members of the group. Added benefits to helping others include more "cognitive rehearsal" when concepts are explained and subsequently enable a better understanding and retention of material for the student doing the teaching. Students teaching students according to McKeachie, at al. (1986) is extremely effective for a wide range of goals, content, and students of different levels and personality.
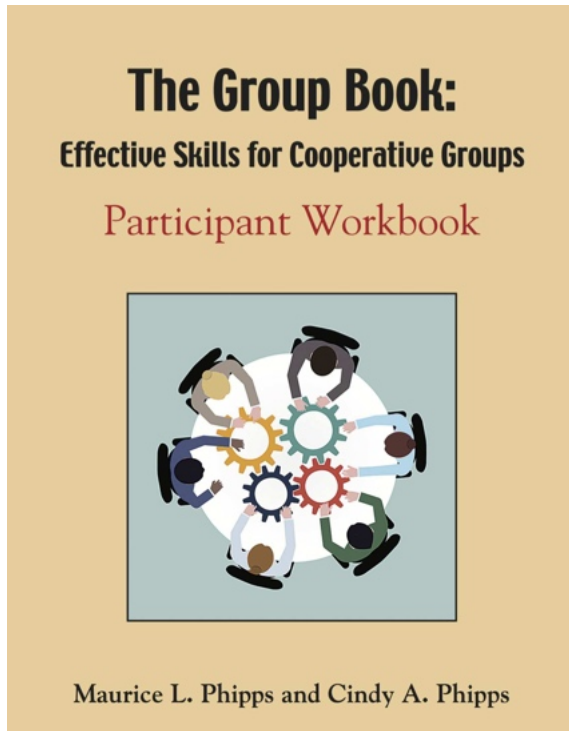
This workbook is for learning group concepts, skills and strategies

The Group Book:
Effective Skills for Cooperative Groups

by Maurice L.Phipps and Cindy A. Phipps

Order the complete book from the publisher
Booklocker.com

https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/8753.html?s=pdf
or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.