# 1

# Introduction to Group Dynamics

## Learning Objectives

1. Define the term *group* and specify the necessary conditions required to qualify as a group.
2. Compare and contrast these four basic types of groups: primary groups, social groups, collectives, and categories.
3. Explain how membership in a group, collective, or category can influence in individual’s social identity.
4. List and briefly explain the 10 key characteristics of groups: composition, boundaries, size, interaction, interdependence, structure, goals, origin, unity, and entitativity.
5. Summarize the key assumptions of these theories pertaining to groups and their dynamics: Dunbar’s social brain hypothesis, Bales’ Interaction Process Analysis (task and relationship interaction), McGrath’s theory of group tasks, Arrow, McGrath, and Berdahl’s analysis of group origins, and Campbell’s concept of entitativity.
6. Identify the implications of the Thomas Theorem for understanding group dynamics and the group fallacy.
7. List and give an example of each of these basic group processes, formation, influence, performance, and conflict.
8. Describe how groups change over time, drawing on Tuckman’s theory of group development.
9. Summarize Hofstede’s theory of cultural differences, and use that theory to compare cultures in terms of readiness to perceive and endorse group-level explanations.
10. Defend the value of studying groups in terms of knowledge gained pertaining to (a) individuals, (b) society, and (c) practical problems.

## Outline

1. What are groups?
   1. Defining groups
   2. Varieties of groups
   3. Characteristics of groups
2. What are group dynamics?
   1. Dynamic group processes
   2. Process and progress over time
3. Why study groups?
   1. Understanding people
   2. Understanding the social world
   3. Applications to practical problems

## Overview

This introductory chapter defines groups and previews the book’s topics. After reviewing various definitions of the term *group*, it offers a taxonomy of groups: primary, social, collectives, and categories (Much of the book is devoted to social, or secondary, groups.) The chapter then examines ten qualities of groups (expanded from the last edition) to prompt the reader to look more closely at groups and the qualities that define them: composition, boundaries, size, interaction, interdependence of the members, structure, goals, origin, cohesion (unity), and entitativity.

Previous editions examined the history of the field in Chapter 1, but that material has been shortened and now appears in chapter 2. Replacing that material is a more detailed discussion of group dynamics—the interpersonal processes that take place in groups—and a preview of the book’s contents. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of the importance of understanding groups, and parallels the analysis presented briefly in the preface.

This edition also includes a case study to provide continuity for the material. The case is the Adventure Consultants Guided Expedition, a group of climbers who encountered serious difficulties in their attempt to summit Mt. Everest. Although an example of a group that performs poorly, its characteristics and dynamics have been well documented, and it aptly illustrates the chapter’s basic message: Failing to understand groups and their dynamics can lead to very negative consequences.

## Activities

***1-1. Identifying Groups.*** Help students answer the question, “What is a group?” by splitting the class up into groups and giving them examples of aggregates that vary in “groupness” and ask them to rank order them from the most to least group-like. In a report-back session, review the list and identify the ways groups differ and their common properties (e.g., size, duration, cohesiveness, identity, and so on). You can also classify each group into one of the four basic types of groups listed in the text’s Figure 1-1.

Instructions. Humans are social animals, for we naturally gravitate away from isolated circumstances into groups. But what, precisely, is a group?

Which collections of people listed below are groups, and which ones are not? For each group, enter G for Group, N for Not a group, or **?** if you aren’t certain. Also, rank the aggregates from 1 (the most group-like) to 25 (the least group-like).

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| Group? | Rank | Aggregate |
|  |  | 1. The spectators at a college football game. |
|  |  | 1. Two people flirting with each other, having met for the first time at a club |
|  |  | 1. All the students in a class |
|  |  | 1. All the students at this school |
|  |  | 1. A mob of rioters burning stores in the inner city |
|  |  | 1. Individuals in a queue waiting to pay for items in a grocery store |
|  |  | 1. The Smith family (husband, wife, 3 children, 1 grandparent) |
|  |  | 1. People who enjoy classical music |
|  |  | 1. The faculty in the Math Dept. at their homes on a holiday when classes are not in session |
|  |  | 1. All the people who are friends with the same person in Facebook |
|  |  | 1. All the members of the American Group Psychologists Association |
|  |  | 1. A crowd watching a street musician on a sidewalk |
|  |  | 1. A secretary talking to the boss by telephone |
|  |  | 1. 6 employees wearing sound-muffling earplugs working on an assembly line |
|  |  | 1. The Dave Matthews Band |
|  |  | 1. People who drive Mini-Cooper automobiles |
|  |  | 1. People who live in the same neighborhood |
|  |  | 1. African Americans |
|  |  | 1. Four individuals writing and editing the same Google document at the same time |
|  |  | 1. The group you are in right now |
|  |  | 1. People in the U.S. who are opposed to capital punishment and write their senator expressing their views |
|  |  | 1. Friends who do things together |
|  |  | 1. Members of a sports team |
|  |  | 1. Women citizens of the U.S. |
|  |  | 1. People in the audience at a movie |

***1-2. Ice-breakers.*** Students move more quickly toward cohesion if the first session of the class includes activities that increase their interest in the subject, and also serve to introduce them to one another. These types of activities are generally called ice-breakers, and they can range from simple self-introductions to more interpersonally challenging activities. Examples include:

*Group picture*. Groups, for some reason, are very willing to be photographed, and gathering together for the picture gives the students the opportunity to work together to achieve a simple outcome.

*Self-disclosure*. If space allows, ask students to move from one side of the room to the other to indicate their agreement or disagreement with some questions about their interests, background, and goals. Avoid any questions dealing with topics that students may not wish to share publicly.

*Bucket brigade.* Have the students work together to accomplish a simple task that requires a high level of coordination, such as a “bucket brigade.” Bring to class a large bag of 100 or more plastic balls. Tell the students that they must move the balls from the classroom to a “storage facility” (a box) located somewhere in the building but outside of the classroom. Explain that only a single student can touch one ball at a time, and if a ball is dropped it must be returned to the starting position. This task is more effective if (a) students are not told where the “storage facility” for the balls is located (and so must send out scouts) and (b) if the storage facility is located close enough that the students can pass each ball from one to another to the box but far enough away so they aren’t tempted to just pick up a ball, walk to the storage facility, and then walk back for another.

***1-3. Kinds of Groups.*** Introduce students to the study of groups by asking them to review the groups to which they belong and the way these groups influence them.

Instructions. Almost all of our time is spent interacting in groups. We are educated in groups, we work in groups, we worship in groups, and we play in groups. But even though we live our lives in groups, we often take them for granted. Consider their influence on you by naming the groups to which you belong, as well as those that influence you.

1. Make a list of all the groups you belong to now. List as many as possible, including primary groups, social groups, collectives, and categories. Be sure to include dyads in your list.
2. What general conclusions can you draw about the groups you listed in item #1?
3. Which group has changed the most over time? Describe this change briefly.
4. Which group is highest in cohesiveness, and which is highest in entitativity?
5. Which group has influenced you, personally, the most? Explain the group’s influence on you briefly.
6. Identify five groups that you do not belong to, but that influence you in some way. Of these groups, which one influences you—your behaviors, emotions, or outcomes—the most?

***1-4. The Ubiquity of Groups****.*Ask students to state how many groups that they interact with, during the course of a week. Then, ask them to keep a running list, for 5 days, of every group they join in. Spend time in class reviewing the types of groups they should consider listing, and remind them to include groups they might overlook, including dyads and online groups. A second way to help students “see” groups is to spend time, in class, listing the groups to which group members belong. Using a nominal group method, ask the students to list all the groups they belong to on a sheet of paper. Then pool their responses in a collective session, identifying unique groups, similarities, and noting their classifications.

***1-5. Goal Setting****.*Use a modified nominal group method to identify your goals and students’ goals. Distribute index cards to students and have them provide their names, majors, and so on. Ask them to list 5 groups they belong to and 3 questions about groups they want answered. Pool their questions during class, asking each student to read a question from his or her list. Continue, in round-robin fashion, soliciting questions and note them in abbreviated form on a flip-chart or the board. Summarize the session by reviewing the topics to be examined during the semester, and relate the topics back to their questions.

***1-6. Demonstrating Group Characteristics and Dynamics****.* The “welcome to groups” quiz is a very versatile activity, for you can use it to demonstrate group dynamics, review course material, and also stimulate engagement and discussion. Have students take the quiz both individually but also in a small discussion group, but be sure to let them know that scores do not count as a grade. You can include items from the test bank to foreshadow the topics the course will cover and items that introduce the course requirements (from the syllabus). For example:

1. Which statement is true?
   1. This course will examine the behavior of animals in groups, including primates and invertebrates.
   2. Wikipedia defines “group dynamics” as “the science of group behavior.”
   3. This course falls in the category of “humanities class” rather than “science class.”
   4. Most leaders work alone.
   5. Approximately 1 billion groups (of humans) exist on planet Earth.
   6. This course will take an empirical approach to the analysis of groups and group processes.
2. Of the following, which one is the weakest indicator the student is “engaged” in the class?
   1. asks questions about course logistics, such as due dates
   2. brings materials needed for the session (e.g., copy of readings, correct text, pen/paper)
   3. completes assignments on time
   4. contributes to class discussions with comments that indicate preparation
   5. remains attentive during class
   6. writes essays, papers, prewriting, etc. that indicates study of course materials
3. Of the following, which one is the strongest indicator of *lack* of engagement?
   1. engages in off topic conversations with other students during class
   2. express negativity about course methods or content (e.g., through complaining, dismissing, ridiculing, showing contempt)
   3. leaves class early, arrives late for class, steps out of the class
   4. does not log into Blackboard regularly
   5. makes statements in class that indicate they have not done the reading

You can also include a few more obscure items like those listed below. The answers on the following items are D.

1. How many groups exist at this time?

a. 100,000

b. approximately 1 million

c. approximately 1 billion

d. more than 7 billion

e. between 10 and 20 million

2. Which statement about juries is true?

a. The single juror who disagrees with the verdict favored by the 11 other jurors manages to change the jury’s verdict about 25% of the time.

b. Because juries are made up of people who don’t know each other, each juror has an equal influence on the group’s deliberations.

c. About one third of all juries end in a deadlock.

d. Men jurors tend to talk more than women jurors.

3. Which is false?

a. Lewin is pronounced to rhyme with “shoe in.”

b. Some early experts on crowds believed groups had “minds”.

c. Freud believed group bonds were libidinal in source.

d. People in groups are more helpful in emergencies than lone individuals.

4. You read about a college student who drinks so much alcohol that she must be hospitalized. If this class was asked to explain her actions, we would be mostly likely to stress:

a. Her upbringing and family values.

b. Her experiences in high school.

c. Her leadership qualities.

d. The norms of the group that she belonged to.

e. Her personal virtues, such as her morality.

5. A man bought a horse for $60 and sold it for $70. Then he bought it back for $80 and again sold it for $90. How much money did he make in the horse-trading business?

a. $40

b. $10

c. none

d. $20

e. $30

***1-7. Motives and Goals in Class.*** Before giving your students a syllabus, ask them to meet in groups and develop one themselves. You can structure this task using the worksheet that follows, but note that this exercise tends to be extremely dynamic. Group members often have very different views on these issues, which they resolve through discussion only partially. Then, if the class contains several groups that meet to describe their decisions, intergroup conflict can occur. Remind students that the exercise is informational only, and will not have a binding impact on their final course design.

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| **Syllabus in Group Dynamics** | |
| Instructions. For this exercise you are role-playing a team of professors who are teaching a course on groups. You are planning the syllabus and general structure of the class: goals, format, activities, tests, and general policies. Begin by introducing yourselves to one another. Also, pick someone who will act as the spokesperson for the group. Note: this activity is a role-play only, and will not necessarily influence the design of this course. | |
| *What Are the Goals for this Course?* What do you want students in the class to learn? How should this course contribute to their overall educational goals? What should they know about groups when the course ends? Rate each goal below: 3 stars for high priority goals (\*\*\*), 2 for lower priority goals (\*\*), and 1 for low priority goals (\*). Give ones you are uncertain of a “?” | |
| \_\_\_ Ability to observe a group and understand its dynamics  \_\_\_ Competence in working with other people in a group context  \_\_\_ Comprehensive knowledge of major research studies of group processes  \_\_\_ Firm grasp of theories that explain group processes  \_\_\_ Improved proficiency in leading a group successfully  \_\_\_ Knowledge of how to do research that will lead to improvement of groups  \_\_\_ Knowledge of ways group dynamics can be applied to improve groups  \_\_\_ Understanding of basic processes that occur in groups (e.g., leadership, conformity)  \_\_\_ Understanding of ways groups can be used to help people (therapeutic groups)  Note any other goals not listed above. | |
| *What Topics Will Be Covered in this Class?* What do you want to teach students about groups? Rate each topic: 3 stars for the topics that are most important to teach (\*\*\*), 2 for important topics (\*\*), and 1 for low priority topics (\*). Give ones you are uncertain of a “?”. | |
| \_\_\_ Cohesion in groups  \_\_\_ Conformity  \_\_\_ Collectivism and individualism  \_\_\_ Conflict between group members  \_\_\_ Conflict between groups  \_\_\_ Crowds, mobs, and collectives  \_\_\_ Decision making in groups  \_\_\_ Ecology of groups: group settings  \_\_\_ Formation of groups  \_\_\_ Group development  \_\_\_ History of research on groups | \_\_\_ Identity and the influence of groups on identity  \_\_\_ Improving the effectiveness of groups  \_*\_\_* Influence in groups  \_\_\_ Leadership  \_\_\_ Obedience and power  \_\_\_ Research methods  \_\_\_ Structure of groups (norms, roles)  \_\_\_ Teams and teamwork  \_\_\_ Theoretical explanations of groups  \_\_\_ Therapeutic, self-help groups |
| What other topics should you examine in the course? | |

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| *What Learning/Teaching Methods Should We Use in the Class*? What methods will be used to teach this material? Again, rate each possible activity using one to three stars (more stars, the more you like the method). |
| \_\_\_ Assign students to a group to carry out a semester-long project dealing with groups.  \_\_\_ Class reads and discusses articles from primary sources, such as journal articles.  \_\_\_ Professor and guest lecturers present information about groups.  \_\_\_ Professor leads class in class-as-whole discussion of topics.  \_\_\_ Students spend a portion of the class in subgroups carrying out activities (such as this one).  \_\_\_ Students work in teams using online communication systems  \_\_\_ Students will do individual work, such as term paper, book reviews, etc. |
| *What Types of Assignments Will Be Made*? What methods should be used to evaluate our progress toward our goals? Again, rate each possible method using one to three stars (more stars, the more you like the method). |
| \_\_\_ Cumulative objective final exam  \_\_\_ Classroom participation grades  \_\_\_ Essay examinations (how many? \_\_\_)  \_\_\_ Grades assigned by other class members to individuals in groups/class  \_\_\_ Group project completed by semester’s end (all group members get same grade)  \_\_\_ Individual projects completed by semester’s end  \_\_\_ Keep a journal of ideas/observations related to groups  \_\_\_ Multiple choice examinations covering text/lecture/activity material (how many? \_\_\_)  \_\_\_ Oral examinations (how many? \_\_\_)  \_\_\_ Pop quizzes (how many? \_\_\_)  \_\_\_ Short papers giving analysis of group’s activities written after each classroom activity  \_\_\_ Students lead the class in a discussion of a topic, and review of assigned articles  \_\_\_ Students make one or more presentations to class (short, say 15 minutes)  \_\_\_ Take-home essay exams (how many? \_\_\_)  \_\_\_ Term paper  \_\_\_ Writing assignments (literature review, book reviews)  \_\_\_ Other |

## Discussion Questions

1. What is so special about two-person groups that makes them so different from other groups?
2. Which type of group most influences a person: their small, social groups or the social categories to which they belong?
3. Is this class a group and, if so, what are its key characteristics?
4. Why don't people “see” groups and why should they?

## Key Terms

**collective**  A relatively large aggregation or group of individuals who display similarities in actions and outlook. A street crowd, a line of people (a queue), and a panicked group escaping a fire are examples of collectives, as are more widely dispersed groups (e.g., listeners who respond similarly to a public service announcement).

**composition** The individuals who constitute a group.

**entitativity**  The apparent cohesiveness or unity of an assemblage of individuals; the quality of being a single entity rather than a set of independent, unrelated individuals (coined in Campbell, 1958).

**essentialism** The belief that all things, including individuals and groups, have a basic nature that makes them what they are and distinguishes them from other things; a thing’s essence is usually inferred rather than directly observed and is generally assumed to be relatively unchanging.

**fundamental attribution error** The tendency to overestimate the causal influence of dispositional factors while underemphasizing the causal influence of situational factors.

**group cohesion** The solidarity or unity of a group resulting from the development of strong and mutual interpersonal bonds among members and group-level forces that unify the group, such as shared commitment to group goals and esprit de corps.

**group dynamics** Interpersonal processes that occur within and between groups; also, the scientific study of those processes.

**group structure** The organization of a group, including the members, their interrelations, and their interactions.

**group** Two or more individuals who are connected by and within social relationships.

**interdependence** Mutual dependence, as when one’s outcomes, actions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences are influenced, to some degree, by other people.

**norm** A consensual and often implicit standard that describes what behaviors should and should not be performed in a given context.

**primary group** A small, long-term group characterized by frequent interaction, solidarity, and high levels of interdependence among members that substantially influences the attitudes, values, and social outcomes of its members.

**relationship interaction** (socioemotional interaction) The conjointly adjusted actions of group members that relate to or influence the nature and strength of the emotional and interpersonal bonds within the group, including both sustaining (social support, consideration) and undermining actions (criticism, conflict).

**role** A socially shared set of behaviors, characteristics, and responsibilities expected of people who occupy a particular position or type of position within a group; by enacting roles, individuals establish regular patterns of exchange with one another that increase predictability and social coordination.

**social capital** The degree to which individuals, groups, or larger aggregates of people are linked in social relationships that yield positive, productive benefits; analogous to economic capital (fiscal prosperity), but determined by extensiveness of social connectedness.

**social category** A perceptual grouping of people who are assumed to be similar to one another in one or more, such as all men, high-school students, the elderly, or math professors way.

**social group** A relatively small number of individuals who interact with one another over an extended period of time, such as work groups, clubs, and congregations.

**social identity** An individual’s sense of self derived from relationships and memberships in groups; also, those aspects of the self that are assumed to be common to most or all of the members of the same group or social category.

**social network** A set of interpersonally interconnected individuals or groups.

**stereotype** A socially shared set of qualities, characteristics, and behavioral expectations ascribed to a particular group or category of people.

**task interaction** The conjointly adjusted actions of group members that pertain to the group’s projects, tasks, and goals.

**Thomas theorem** The theoretical premise, put forward by W. I. Thomas, which maintains that people’s conception of a social situation, even if incorrect, will determine their reactions in the situation; “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572).

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| **MindTap activities and resources for Chapter 1: Introduction to Group Dynamics** | | |
| Chapter 1: Mastery Training | Helps students familiarize themselves with important terms that they will learn about in the chapter. | |
| Section 1-1: What Are Groups? | | |
|  | Section 1-1: Reading | 1-1a Defining Groups  1-1b Varieties of Groups  1-1c Characteristics of Groups |
|  | Section 1-1 Quiz | Practice questions that assess students’ understanding of each chapter section and readiness for upcoming tests. |
| Section 1-2: What Are Group Dynamics? | | |
|  | Section 1-2: Reading | 1-2 What Are Group Dynamics?  1-2a Dynamic Group Processes  1-2b Process and Progress over Time |
|  | Section 1-2 Quiz | Practice questions that assess students’ understanding of each chapter section and readiness for upcoming tests. |
| Section 1-3: Why Study Groups? | | |
|  | Section 1-3: Reading | 1-3a Understanding People  1-3b Understanding the Social World  1-3c Applications to Practical Problems |
|  | Section 1-3 Quiz | Practice questions that assess students’ understanding of each chapter section and readiness for upcoming tests. |
| Section 1-4: The Value of Groups | | |
|  | Section 1-4: Reading | 1-4 The Value of Groups; no section 1.4 quiz |
| Chapter 1: Review and Resources | | |
|  | Chapter Review | End-of-chapter outline summary |
|  | Resources | List of sources |
| Chapter 1: Test | Auto-gradable questions that assesses students’ understanding of the chapter. | |