
Student Manual for Group Dynamics

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What is Group Dynamics?

The purpose of this course is to explore the socio-emotional processes within small groups. How do people relate to each other in a group? How does the group itself acquire a unique "personality" of its own that changes over time? How do people and groups behave online compared to in-person?

This course is very different from typical undergraduate courses. There will be some lectures, but the course is mostly experiential. We will explore how you behave in a small group, how you perceive and react to others, and how they perceive and react to you. If you don't particularly like discovering and revealing things about yourself, or feel very uncomfortable interacting with people in groups, you probably should not take this course. The course includes the following activities:

1. Process group meetings (once a week for 1.5 hours)
2. Task group meetings (once a week for 1.5 hours)
3. Weekly process notes (posted online)
4. Friday afternoon class discussions, exercises, mini-lectures
5. Group projects for your task group
6. Special assignments
7. Weekly quizzes on book chapters
8. The Critical Concepts exam
9. Online sharing of process notes

Refer to this manual religiously! It's your responsibility to know the ins and outs of this course and ask questions if you don't understand something.

Textbook: *Joining Together*, by Johnson and Johnson.

Blackboard and Email

Blackboard and email are very important parts of this course. If you don't follow what people are saying in Blackboard, you will find yourself "out of the loop."

At any point, feel free to send me an email to let me know how you're doing in the groups and in the course. If there's something you need to talk about, if you feel uncomfortable about something in the course or in your group, or if you want feedback from me, feel free to let me know. Of course you're always welcome to come see me in-person too! Email me and we'll set up a time.

I'd like to be able to discuss your DrS emails with the cofacilitators. But if you'd like to write about something in your DrS that you prefer I NOT discuss with the cofacilitators, that's OK! Mention that specifically in your email. I want you to discuss whatever you feel you need to discuss in your email and will always protect your confidentiality as you wish.

Email is not always reliable. If I don't reply to your email within 24 hours, something went wrong. I probably didn't get it, or it got lost in all the spam I get everyday. Please resend it.

Process Group

We will break the class down into two groups. Once a week on Tuesday or Thursday afternoons for the lab period, each of these small groups will meet for a Process Group meeting. I'll be there too. The purpose of this group is for us to talk about and understand the group, the personalities of our members, and how we all behave in the group. Revealing something about yourself to other people (self-disclosure), sharing your thoughts and feelings about how you perceive other people in the group (feedback), and making observations about the group as a whole, all constitute an "interpersonal learning environment", or simply the **Learning Environment** - "LE" for short.

In this group I don't lecture. I don't tell people what to do. As the "facilitator" I encourage people to enter the LE. I help you talk about yourself and the process of how people are behaving in the group. I encourage self-disclosure and feedback.

The confidentiality of this group is extremely important. Talking to outsiders about what happens in it is an important violation of our rules. I recommend that you do NOT take notes during the group. See if you can figure out why. If not, ask me in group.

No one will be graded for anything they do in the group. You could, theoretically, not talk at all and this would not detract from your grade. However, you surely will learn more and get a lot more personally out of the group if you participate. People who participate tend to get higher grades.

This kind of group is a good testing ground for those interested in being a counselor or psychotherapist. Understanding interpersonal and group dynamics is one of the basic skills of the therapist. And it is also a skill that is extremely useful for anyone, in any professional or business setting, who works with groups of people. Last, but certainly not least, being in this group will help you understand how you react to people and how they react to you.

Task Group

Once a week on Tuesday or Thursday afternoons for the other lab period, your group will meet for a Task Group meeting. Everyone must attend. The purpose of this meeting is carry out a series of projects (see "The Group Projects"). It is up to the team to decide exactly how to use this time. Use this time wisely.

It is normal for people to "goof off" some of the time during these meetings. However, there will be plenty of work to do. Remember, you have projects to carry out! If you waste a lot of time in "social loafing," your group will fall behind on the projects and pay a price for that!

As the group carries out its projects, you should always pay attention to the group dynamics. How are people behaving in the group? What's happening in the group as it tries to accomplish its tasks? Understanding how a task group works will come in handy for almost any job you might have in the future. Study the handout "What to Look for in Groups." It's an excellent summary!

After process and task group meetings, it's a good idea to jot down some observations about the groups. This will come in handy when you write your process notes.

There will be penalties for being absent or late to this group (see "Grading System").

Process Notes

Process notes are a weekly record of your observations and insights about what you see happening in the task group, process group, and afternoon class. We all remember the obvious things that happened, what people said and did. Process notes go deeper than this. In process notes you try to read between the lines. You try to explore the underlying socio-emotional dynamics of how people are behaving and how the group as a whole is functioning.

At the end of each week you will post your notes to Blackboard. Each group will have its own set of discussion boards. For each week of the semester, there will be a separate area for posting your process notes. Divide your process notes into these sections:

Process Group

Task Group

Afternoon Class

Group Behavior Online (Blackboard, texting, Facebook, etc)

Roles and Styles

Subgroups

My Participation

Analysis of Activities and Projects

My term for the week

(choose and explain a technical term from the book, handouts, or class lectures that captures something important about what happened that week. Don't use the same term twice)

Make sure it's a technical term, not some casual word like "friendship" or "productive")

see the example
of process notes
in this manual

See "Writing the Final Paper" for ideas about how to write these process notes. In fact, these process notes are intended to help you develop and record your ideas for writing that final paper. For your process notes you also can get ideas from the textbook, our class discussions, and our handouts. Remember to:

- Start writing your notes early in the week and modify them as the week progresses
- Create an interesting title for your process notes that captures something important
- Devote at least one paragraph to each section (at least three good sentences)
- The deadline for posting notes to Blackboard is Saturday at noon!

Feedback Slips on Process Notes: Each week you must read the process notes of everyone in your group. Quote a comment from four different people - comments that you found insightful, important, or that you would like to ask a question about or respond to. Print out two copies of these quoted comments and your feedback to them. Indicate your name and the week number for each comment. Cut up one of these papers into separate feedback slips. Bring these papers to the next process group meeting and be prepared to talk about the quoted comments and your feedback. I will collect one copy and the cut-feedback slips will be given to the student. One point will be deducted for each comment and/or response that you don't bring to group. If you have to miss that process group, points will be deducted for each comment and/or response that you do not give me (email or hardcopy) before the group meeting. See the sample Feedback on Process Notes.

Missing Group and Late Notes

Missing a process or task group meeting should be taken seriously. What was it like to miss the meeting? How will your absence affect the group and your role in it? How do you think other people will react to your absence? Talk to people about what happened in the meeting you missed. Do different people describe the meeting differently? What might that mean?

Write about these things in your process notes! If you want some feedback from me, come to see me or email me. Process notes must be written every week even if you miss meetings!

If it's many days after the group, you may not remember the details of what happened. That's OK. Write about what you do recall about the group - your retrospective impressions of what was important in the meeting and your reactions/feelings as you look back on it. How did the underlying socio-emotional processes of that meeting influence subsequent meetings?

What if the instructor is absent? In some cases, like when the weather is bad, I might just cancel class. But in other cases, as if I'm sick, your groups might still meet!

Task Group Projects

Week Titles and Highlights: The group will create an interesting title and 5 bullet-point highlights of the week for each week it meets. The title captures what that week was like for the group, and the highlights capture important things that happened during the week. Someone must email these to me no later than the Saturday at the end of that week.

Instructor Assignments: I will give you some of the assignments for this task group projects. For example, your first project will be creating a name for your group.

The Textbook Projects: In the textbook there are group exercises. Your group will choose and try out some of these exercises.

Task Group Project Reports: For all tasks and projects, your group will together write and then hand in a report. See the page "Task Group Project Reports" for guidelines about how to write it. I will give you a deadline for handing in the report. Usually it will be due by the end of the weekend.

The Group Presentation: In the last week of classes your task group will do a 60 minute presentation. The presentation can be as creative and original as you like. However, it must be educational, relevant to our course. All members of your group must participate. Do something specific to get the students from the other group to react to or participate in your presentation.

Point deductions

- for each day a report is late
- for not handing in a report
- for a less than adequate report, or I might ask the group to rewrite the report

Special Assignments

The Observation of a Class

Observe any class on campus. In a short paper describe your analysis of the group's dynamics. Apply the same ideas that you use for analyzing task and process groups. Start the paper off with a description of the class composition, size, where it meets, and any other information that gives me a feel for how the class appears or what its purpose is. Do not mention the name of the professor, the title of the course, or the names of any of the students. Also consider:

- The professor's teaching style and how it affects the class.
- The interactions between the professor and students
- The interactions among the students and how that affects the class
- The characteristics and personalities of the students and how this affects the class
- The emotional atmosphere of the class.
- Your personal reactions to the class and what that might mean about the group dynamics

Try to get to the class early. Observe and report on how the students interact with each other and with the professor before the class actually starts. This information will be important for understanding the class when it is in progress.

You must contact the professor at least one day before the class to get permission to attend. No more than two students can observe the same class at the same time. Take notes!

The In Vivo Observation

Observe any group on campus IN VIVO, in its natural setting. The cafeteria will probably be the best setting to locate such a group, although you may try the library, lounges, dorms, etc. The group must consist of at least three people and you must observe them for at least 20 minutes. If the group breaks up before 20 minutes are up, locate and observe another group for the remainder of the time. Take notes!

Begin the paper with a description of the group size, composition, where it is meeting, its purpose, and any other information that gives me a feel for how the group. Do not mention the names of the people in the group or any other information that might reveal who these people are. In your paper:

- State where the group was, how many people, males/females, etc.
- Analyze the group dynamics. Apply important concepts.
- How did the setting affect the group dynamics?
- If you observed more than one group, compare them.

Try to be unobtrusive. Try not to stare at people: Mom always said it's not polite. If people ARE aware of your watching them, how does this affect the group process? You may not be able to hear all of what the people are saying, so you will have to be sensitive to body language and facial expressions. Even if you cannot hear the people at all, it is still possible to analyze the dynamics (believe it or not)!

Create an interesting titles for each assignment that captures something important about that group.

Both assignments must be typed and just one page in length, single-spaced with a break between paragraphs. Each assignment is worth 10 points.

An Example of Process Notes

John Smith, Week 4: Harmony and Affection!

THE PROCESS GROUP

The group was very quiet. I think people KNOW how to get into the LE but are feeling anxious about it. Dr. Suler encourage people to talk about that and Sally was the first to reply. When she talked about feeling uncomfortable about self-disclosure and feedback, I think she was speaking for how many people in the group feel. That seemed to break the ice and the group got rolling. There were lots of references to other psychology classes and other professors, and I think this indicates how this course by comparison is very different for us. The LE is taking time for us to get used to. We're used to professors lecturing and telling us what to do. I think people might be a little anxious about being vulnerable, or making other people angry, or being rejected, if they start giving feedback. There's a tendency for us to be nice to each other, to not ruffle any feathers. The "harmony and affection" stage!

THE TASK GROUP

We got off to a late start. Howard and Beth came late again. I think other people in the group are starting to get annoyed about this. But no one is really talking about that. They try to ignore it. People seem to want to "make nice" with each other. It's the "harmony and affection" stage again! We do like each other, and are getting our tasks done, but we do need to get organized and be more efficient in making decisions. It's hard because no clear leader has emerged in the group. People seem to be competing for that leader role.

THE AFTERNOON CLASS

I noticed how the two groups seem to be sitting near each other in the afternoon class. Interesting! People seem to drift off when Dr. Suler gave his minilecture. Maybe it's our resistance to this class becoming anything like a "typical" lecture class! When we played that game "freeze" I noticed that many of the role plays involved people feeling anxious about self-disclosure.

GROUP BEHAVIOR ONLINE

People seem to be more open in our Blackboard group, especially the people who are usually quiet. Maybe it's easier to speak your mind when you're not looking at each other face-to-face. Participation has also slowed a lot in the discussion area for the whole class. Sam continues to post his notes late, maybe trying to "fly under the radar?" The group has started texted a lot as a way to communicate outside of group. Friending? Violation of group boundaries?

ROLES AND STYLES

Sally is definitely becoming a socio-emotional leader in the task and process groups. Bob and Howard seem to be competing for the role of task leader. It's funny, though, because Howard, and Beth too, seem to be sort of "rebel" personalities. Linda has been very quiet. I'm not sure why.

SUBGROUPS

Howard and Beth seem to be forming an alliance, sort of a "rebel" subgroup. Bob and I have been going to lunch lately, so I guess we're forming a subgroup too. I wonder what others think of that?

MY PARTICIPATION

I've been quiet in process group. I hope people don't think that I'm not interested. I am! I'm just a little uncomfortable giving feedback and self-disclosing. I think I'm afraid of rejection.

ANALYSIS OF ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

The group story revealed anxiety about the LE that was so obvious in p-group this week. I was looking at our group poster and noticed that Jim's name is pushed into the corner. He acts like that in group sometimes. During the Tower Building exercise, we tried to make our Tower too big and it fell over. Are we overly ambitious?

MY TERM FOR THE WEEK

"PAIRING" - I think that my becoming friendly with Bob is pairing. We like each other because we're both quiet. I think we're also starting to feel a little like we're supporting and protecting each other in group.

An example of process notes feedback slips from “Sally”

Bring to process group two copies of this feedback sheet, with one of them cut up into slips. Give the cut-up feedback slips to the person that you are replying to, and you'll give to me the uncut page of feedbacks.

Harry said (week 3):

"The group seems to be stuck in a harmony and affection stage. No one seems to want to rock the boat or talk about anything important. There's an awful lot of chit-chat in process group. This is making me frustrated."

I feel the same way. I noticed that Betty and Arthur have been giving each other looks during process group, and seem to disagree a lot during task group. Is there some tension between the two of them?
(Sally)

----- (cut here)

Willy said (week 3):

"I enjoyed the movie during the afternoon class, but I noticed that Betty kept talking to Harry during it. It was a little distracting."

I'm sorry about that, Willy! I tend to be a little worked up in the afternoon class, and when I'm feeling that way I have a hard time stopping myself from talking. I'm wondering if that bothers anyone else? (Sally)

----- (cut here)

Arthur said (week 3):

"I felt really quiet during task and process group this week. I also came late to process group. I'm wondering how people are reacting to me this week."

You did seem rather quiet. I was worried about you. And you've been coming to group late several times now. Do you feel that you're being left out or something? (Sally)

----- (cut here)

Betty said (week 3):

"Arthur is trying really hard to be the leader of the task group. He often starts off the group and right away comes up with suggestions about how we should do things. Arthur and Sally don't seem to mind, but I'd like to lead the group sometimes too. Arthur doesn't seem to give me or anyone a chance to do that."

I never realized that. It's true that I don't mind when Arthur takes the lead. I guess in a way it makes it easier for me. I can just relax a little and contribute to the task when I have something to say. I didn't realize it was having this effect on you. Maybe you should bring it to group!! ☺ (Sally)

You must give me these feedback slips on time in process group. The purpose of these slips is to encourage feedback and self-disclosure during group. Giving them to me after group does not accomplish that purpose.

Task Group Project Reports

Unless I say otherwise, your reports for the textbook projects and any other projects I assign you should follow the outline below. Your group members should collaborate in preparing each report. The whole group should discuss in detail the ideas that will go into it and how its paragraphs should be organized. Someone should write down these ideas during the discussion. One person may take on the job of typing up the report. The whole group should read the first draft of the report and make suggestions on how it might be modified. Use Blackboard to share, discuss, and revise the report. Only hand in the final hardcopy version of the report to me.

The report should be at least one page, single-spaced, typed, double-spaced between paragraphs and divided into these sections using the following headings. These reports will not be graded, but points will be deducted for reports that are late or incomplete, or I may ask you to rewrite the report.

1. Title of the exercise

Use the title of the exercise. Write a very brief description of what the exercise involved (three or four sentences at most)

2. Process

Describe the process of what happened in the group while doing the exercise. If it was a textbook activity, how did the group decide on that particular exercise? How did group members behave during the exercise? What was the group atmosphere like?.... etc.

3. Outcome

What did the outcome of the exercise reveal about the group and its members? If the activity resulted in a product of some kind (a poster, a group story, etc), what does that product reveal about the group, its members, and the relationships in the group? If the activity required a decision to be made, what does that decision reveal about the group?

4. Recommendations for Improving Task Performance

Based on what happened during this exercise, how can the group improve in its task performance – for example, leadership styles, communication strategies, and decision-making. Did the group succeed in using recommendations from your previous reports?

Suggestions for Running an Effective Task Group Meeting

Students from previous years make the following recommendations for running task group:

Prepare ahead for the meeting: Use Blackboard to discuss ideas about what you might do in the next task group meeting. If the group decides on a particular textbook task ahead of time, everyone should read that exercise before group.

Be on time and be prepared: Let people know if you are going to be absent or late. Remember, there are a limited number of times you can be absent or late, and then points are deducted. Allow a maximum of five minutes for people to show up, then start group without them.

Select a Task Leader: Take turns being task leader for the day. People may want to volunteer for being task leader depending on the type of task it is. If possible, decide on the task leader ahead of time, perhaps by discussing it on Blackboard. The assigned leader may want to prepare for the meeting. Facilitators should not be the task leader.

Respect the responsibilities of the task leader: It's not easy being task leader. People may get annoyed with him/her. Try to respect the responsibilities of the task leader, which include:

1. Encouraging everyone to express their ideas and opinions
2. Guiding the group into making decisions, hopefully by encouraging consensus, but if not, then by calling for a vote
3. Asking for volunteers for specific tasks, or assigning them if no one is volunteering.
4. Asking disruptive people to be quiet and to behave properly
5. Making "small" decisions for the group, if necessary

Set time limits: Discuss and set time limits on the preliminary discussion, decision-making, and the different components of the task. Someone should be given the job of keeping track of time.

Ask for suggestions and feedback from the facilitator: The facilitators should not be running the group, but ask them for their observations about what is happening in the group and for their suggestions.

Respect each other.

Give constructive feedback to improve behaviors.

Be willing to compromise.

The Documents Folder

During the course there will be all sorts of writings, documents, pictures, drawings, etc. produced by the groups. Save as many of these as you can in a folder which we'll call your "documents folder." All of these things are bits of information that reveal important aspects of the groups dynamics. One skill I want you to develop - and to demonstrate in your process notes and final paper - is the ability to analyze and compare these documents as evidence of important issues in group dynamics. Make sure you keep your documents folder in a safe place. Protect the confidentiality of its contents!

The Weekly Chapter Quizzes

We will have a quiz each Friday afternoon on a chapter from our textbook, starting with chapter 1. Here's a hint: when I create the quizzes, I focus first on information from the chapters that relates to what is happening in our groups.

The Critical Concepts Exam

The CC exam tests you on the core, most important concepts related to this course. The questions come from the introductory lectures that I give at the beginning of the semester.

Grading System

Process notes	100 pts total
Quizzes on chapters	100 pts total
Final paper	100 pts
Group presentation	20 pts
Memorizing LE poem	10 pts
2 special assignments	20 pts total
The critical concepts exam	40 pts

Point Deductions

You are permitted to miss (with a valid excuse) two group meetings and one Friday class. For each absence after that, there will be a point deductions. If you miss a scheduled task group meeting, you owe the group one hour of work. It's the group's obligation to report in the process notes that someone was absent.

You may come late (i.e. more than 5 minutes) or leave early from a group or class meeting only three times. After that there will be point deductions for each lateness. It is the group's obligation to report in their process notes that someone came late or left early.

Writing the Final Paper

The final paper summarizes your observations about the course and the groups. You should apply your knowledge of the terms and concepts discussed in the afternoon class and in the textbook. Follow the rules below.

Use and underline 16 different technical terms from the textbook and our class handouts (at least 8 from the textbook). Do not use casual or layman's expressions! Underline each term only once.

Divide the paper into following major sections and subsections using all the headings listed below. The major heading should be centered. The subheading should be left justified and underlined. Devote one paragraph (no more than half a page) to each subsection. Do not include ideas in parenthesis in the subheadings. Be concise and insightful in each paragraph!

Introduction

The purpose of the process group

The purpose of the task group

The importance of group boundaries

Advantages/disadvantages of our course format compared to other group dynamics courses

The Process Group

The development of the group over the semester (stages and other changes)

Critical events and turning points (including important LE discussions and other events)

Communication patterns (who talked to whom, usual topics discussed, emotional tones, energy levels, flow and organization of the discussion, interruptions, etc)

Factors that affected the LE (LE anxiety and other factors)

The more obvious socio-emotional processes in the group

Hidden socio-emotional issues that the group never fully discussed and explored

Task Group

The development of the group over the semester

Critical events and turning points

Communication patterns

Factors that affected decision-making and task success (including leadership issues)

The more obvious socio-emotional processes in the group

Hidden socio-emotional issues in the group

The Afternoon Class

The group atmosphere and changes in it

Interactions among people and subgroups

Group Behavior Online

The significance of how people behaved in Blackboard, via texting, in social media, etc.
How online behavior compared to in-person behavior

Roles and Styles

Roles and personality styles of people in group
How others reacted to those roles and styles
Leadership structure of the group (including task and socio-emotional leading)

Subgroups

Why certain subgroups formed (dyads, triads, etc.)
Changes in subgroup patterns over time
How subgroups affected the group

Draw and explain a sociogram of the group

Highlight the most important patterns of attractions and conflict. Don't just draw "positive" lines connecting everyone to everyone else!

My Participation

My role and behavior style in group
How others perceived me and reacted to me
Using my personal reactions and feelings to understand group
My behavior in and reactions to the afternoon class
What I learned about myself

Analysis of Activities and Projects

Pick three activities or projects from the afternoon class or task group. In separate paragraphs with separate headings, write about what that activity or project revealed about the group, its members, and you.

Propose some conclusion or hypothesis about your group. In a paragraph with a heading that states your conclusion, support that hypothesis with evidence from three documents in your documents folder.

Conclusions

How could this learning experience have been improved?
What general conclusions can you draw about the groups and this learning experience?
Feel free to be creative in this section!

The LE

(a poem... to be memorized!)

What is the LE?
It's feedback and disclosure,
which, simply put, means people get to know you.

Getting into the LE is not as hard as it seems,
talk about your family, friends, lovers, and dreams.
but that's NOT REQUIRED,
those are things OUTSIDE the group,
the most pure LE is what people do INSIDE the group.

This is so important, recite this part loud!
to get into the LE
talk about what people are doing right here, right now!

This may lead to conflict
but remember that's OK!
It's part of the LE,
talk about it leads to cohesion one day.

The group is like a person,
it has a personality and moods.
Talk about these things
and that's the LE too!

Last but not least
you may recreate in group
your family, friends, triumphs, and strife,
and that's why we call it a microcosm of life.

Talk about that! It's the LE! Hooray!
It's a lot more valuable than getting that "A" !