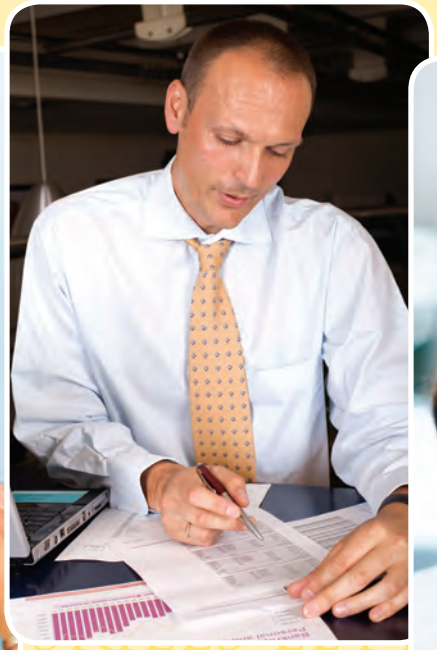
18

Team communication

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- Identify the reasons why people join and leave groups
- Explain the concepts of synergy and social loafing
- Explain the dynamics of roles and norms within groups
- Identify different phases or stages of group development
- Define real and perceived differences between groups and teams
- Explain the similarities and differences between sports teams and work teams
- Explain the strengths and weaknesses of work teams
- Explain the strengths and weaknesses of virtual teams
- Explain the types of communication skills that can best be deployed in groups and teams



Groups, teams and leaders

In chapter 1, we saw that different areas of communication could be meaningfully analysed as a series of concentric circles. There are numerous interconnections between this chapter, dealing with communication in teams or groups, and communication theory, especially channels of communication. You may also note connections with interpersonal and intrapersonal communication ideas (see figure 18.1), particularly feedback (chapters 9 and 10), as well as intercultural, organisational, public and media communication (chapters 15, 16, 17 and online chapter 8). In fact, almost all of the chapters in this book that relate to direct communication are relevant to group interactions.

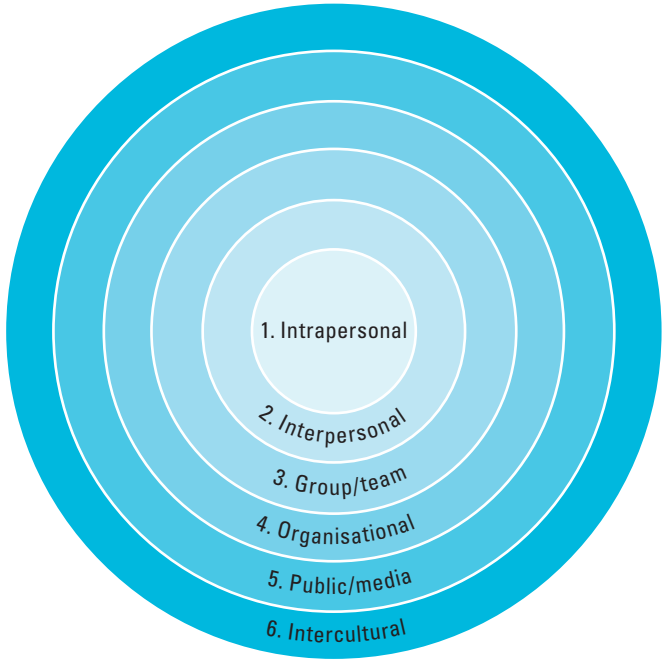


FIGURE 18.1 A concentric model of fields of communication

Groups or teams consist of people who feel they belong together and are united in a common purpose. Groups can be small or large, official or unofficial, permanent or temporary, task-oriented or relationship-oriented (or both), strongly or weakly cohesive, physically concentrated or dispersed, effective or ineffective, and so on.

Are groups and teams the same thing, or are they different? Teams can be seen as a particular type of group, and we will consider team dynamics in this chapter. When we examine groups and teams, we might also consider leaders. Do all groups and teams need leaders, or can they do without them? The issues we explore in this chapter are, in some respects, the mirror image of the ones surrounding the questions of leadership and of meetings as problem-solving tools.

Groups and teams have assumed greater prominence in organisations in the past few decades because of changes that have taken place in the workplace, including:

- a 'flattening' of organisation structure – a reduction in the number of administrative or decision-making levels in the hierarchy of the typical large organisation
- an increase in real or apparent delegation of power or empowerment from top leadership to workgroup members – a move towards organisational democracy
- an increase in the complexity of decision making, so that in some circumstances individuals acting alone no longer have enough technical knowledge and skills to make decisions without the help of others.

In this chapter, we look at the broader dynamics that help, and hinder, group communication. Meetings are a particular arena in which groups and teams flourish or founder, and these are covered in more detail in chapter 19.

Group dynamics: how do groups work?

Groups can come in all shapes and sizes, and include the following:

- committees
- families
- sporting teams
- supporters of sporting teams
- criminal gangs
- juries
- musicians
- fan clubs
- members of a commune
- combat units
- multidisciplinary problem-solving teams
- construction gangs
- Porsche owners
- followers of a particular religion.

These Buddhist monks, who together are preparing for a ceremony in Brisbane, Australia, are members of a group in society. AFL team supporters, business colleagues and family members are all also examples of groups.

Of such a list, which is by no means exhaustive, it might well be said: 'If groups are everything, perhaps they are nothing'. What possible connection could all of these collections of people have?

Group: two or more people who act together to achieve common aims or goals

Social aggregate: a class or order of people who share certain characteristics but do not necessarily share goals

A **group** is distinguished from a **social aggregate** or a category. Examples of social aggregates are:

- all people earning the same income
- all people with the same height
- all people in the same occupation.

Members of groups act together to achieve common aims or goals. Mostly, members of social aggregates or categories do not act in this way, although an aggregate such as people in a lift who did not know each other might become a group if the lift broke down and people began to talk and act together.

Group membership

Every individual is usually a member of many groups. For example, at work, Mary is a member of at least three groups (figure 18.2), although she is the only person who is a member of all three groups shown.

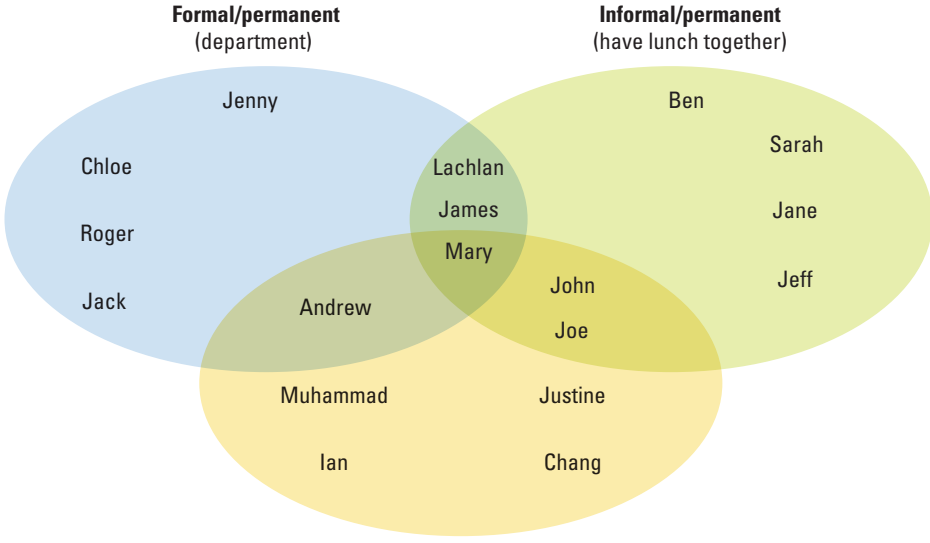


FIGURE 18.2 Group membership patterns

Source: Based on and adapted from Hodgetts and Hegar (2007).

Why should people try to achieve aims or goals in concert with others? Why is the world not composed of lone individuals pursuing their own particular aims and goals? In other words, why do people join groups in the first place? And having joined, will they stay, or leave? There are (at least) five reasons why people join, stay in or leave groups. These are security, task complexity, social interaction, proximity and exchange.

ASSESS YOURSELF

1. What social aggregates do you belong to?
2. What groups do you belong to?
3. Create at least one diagram similar to figure 18.2, to show your membership of at least two groups.

Security

Security: belonging to a group may make us feel safer against external threats

There is safety in numbers. Being a member of a group may make us feel more secure in a hostile environment and therefore satisfy our **security** needs. United we stand, divided we fall.

Task complexity

Task complexity: belonging to a group may allow combinations of specialists to tackle tasks that, individually, they would not normally tackle

Primitive humans joined together in groups or bands not only to satisfy security needs but also to handle **task complexity**. An individual might be able to trap a small animal or gather a small number of plants, but to trap a big animal or gather a large amount of plants required the coordinated efforts of a group.

In modern work environments, groups are almost totally unavoidable – there are very few jobs that can be done by one isolated individual (e.g. a lighthouse keeper) and even then, such an individual is dependent on a network of individuals and groups in the outside world to support the solitary role.

Social interaction

Social interaction: belonging to a group may help satisfy a need for human company

Groups can also satisfy the **social interaction** needs of humans. For many people, work does not simply satisfy economic or survival needs, it provides a social aspect as well. It is for this reason that some people would not quit work tomorrow if, say, they won a substantial lottery tonight. They may not be passionately enthusiastic about the people they work with, but it is their work peers, and the physical environment where the work takes place, that provides a structure for interaction among people. Some people find that this structure gives a sense of meaning to their lives, and when it is taken away – on retirement, for example – it is such a stressful life change their health suffers as a result.

Proximity

Proximity: belonging to a group sometimes happens simply because members find themselves located physically near each other

Why do we choose to become members of one group, or set of groups, rather than others? Often, there is no reason in particular: we would possibly be just as happy in one group, or set of groups, or culture, as another. Practically, the first reason why we choose one particular group is **proximity**: geographical or spatial nearness. This means that students sitting together are more likely to form into a group than a number of students scattered throughout the room, and it also means that a number of workers or managers who work in the same area are more likely to develop a group identity than those who are not physically located close together.

Exchange

Exchange: belonging to a group sometimes depends on a cost–benefit calculation made continually by members

The **exchange** theory of group membership could best be summed up by the expression 'what's in it for me?'. In other words, exchange theorists argue that we all – consciously or unconsciously – weigh up the costs and benefits of being in a group. If a person decides that the costs involved in being in a group (time, effort, putting up with others' idiosyncrasies, stress) exceed the benefits (companionship, economic gain, networking communication), then that person may well leave the group.

Now that we are aware of the five factors that determine whether we join, stay in or leave groups, we can visually analyse our membership in different groups. Using a pie chart, we can give approximate proportions or weight to the segments showing the differing factors. For example, figure 18.3 (see overleaf) shows how Mary could show the patterns of her membership of two groups.

The factors are different for each group. If people or circumstances changed in either group, the diagram for that group would be different.

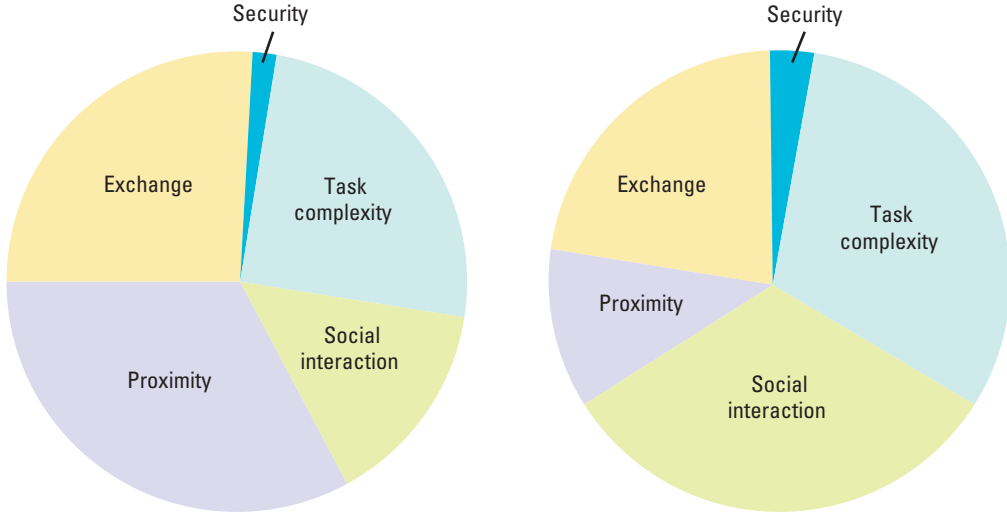


FIGURE 18.3 Five-factor analysis of two of Mary's groups

Group versus individual performance

The next issue to consider is who is better at getting things done – groups or individuals? It's clear that when many complex tasks have to be performed simultaneously, then groups will perform better than individuals. When many complex tasks can be performed nonsimultaneously (e.g. in a sequence) groups may be more effective than individuals, but not necessarily.

When tasks can be performed by individuals independently of others, the presence of others may still have an effect – often beneficial – on an individual's performance. Individuals can be motivated by the presence of others because of:

- the sheer stimulating effect of other people
- self-presentation, or the desire to show others how good you are (which may take the form of competition).

Nevertheless, the presence of others is not always a blessing. We have all probably had the experience of doing something badly because others were watching. In fact, the presence of others makes good individual performance more likely only when tasks are familiar; when tasks are unfamiliar, the presence of others tends to lower performance.

Synergy and social loafing

Synergy: the whole group's performance is greater than the sum of its equal parts

We use groups when we believe that two plus two will equal five – that is, when **synergy** occurs. This means that group productivity is greater than the sum of its individual members' performances. Two plus two, however, sometimes might equal one, when not only does synergy not take place, but also the group's performance is worse than that of the sum of its individual members' performances. This may mean, for example, that:

- participants in a tug of war expend less effort as the team size grows
- members of an audience clap less enthusiastically as the audience size grows
- workers slack off when their computer use is not monitored, and indulge in 'cyber-loafing' such as playing games instead of working.

Social loafing: the tendency of some group members to put in less effort if they believe that their underperformance will not be noted — the phenomenon of one group member getting a 'free ride' while others do the work

This phenomenon is known as **social loafing** (Goren, Kurzban & Rapoport 2003; Lim 2002; Høiagaard, Säfvenbom & Tønnesen 2006, Aggarwal & O'Brien 2009), and can occur in situations where a number of factors are present, such as a lack of obvious supervision (figure 18.4).

Factors that increase loafing	Factors that reduce loafing
■■ Lack of identifiability	■■ Individual identifiability
■■ No individual evaluation	■■ Individual or group evaluation
■■ No individual or group standards of evaluation	■■ Individual or group standards of evaluation
■■ Task is easy, boring or the same as others	■■ Task is difficult, interesting or different from others
■■ Individual contributions not necessary	■■ Individual contributions essential
■■ No individual or group incentives	■■ Individual or group incentives
■■ Large group	■■ Small group
■■ Unfamiliar group	■■ Familiar group

FIGURE 18.4 Factors that affect social loafing

Source: Seta, Paulus and Baron (2000, p. 218).

Social loafing can be overcome when group members become more accountable for their actions, when the activities of the group become more interesting, and when group pride is present – that is, when a group is competing with another group and group members wish to perform well and win the contest (Seta, Paulus & Baron 2000). A study of student project teams found that social loafing/free riding could be overcome to a certain extent by all team members participating in an online interactive activity log and peer review system – a software solution to making all group participants' efforts transparent, and thus perhaps keeping all members honest and hard-working (Brandyberry & Bakke 2006).

Aggarwal and O'Brien (2009) found that team assignments set for students often provided opportunities for social loafing, with the result that many students felt cheated in so far as they only got the same mark as the loafer or loafers. Their suggestions for controlling loafing more include:

- *Limiting the scope of the project*. This is appropriate if students are to work in teams on projects. Instead of a big, semester-long project, break workload up into a smaller project and some other graded work.
- *Reducing group size*. This makes it harder for loafers to hide behind the shield of anonymity. Group members in a small group setting can also get to know each other better, which will increase socio-emotional norms (discussed in more detail shortly) to get potential loafers to work.
- *Running peer evaluations*. Peer evaluations send messages to group members that there will be consequences for nonparticipation, and allow actual or potential loafers to change their behaviour.

These suggestions should work as well in the world of work as they might in academic institutions.

Roles people play

Newcomb (1950) defined a group as consisting 'of people with shared norms and interlocking roles'. In this chapter, we will explore the model of roles and norms shown in figure 18.5 (see overleaf).

Strictly speaking, some informal and formal norms can also be destructive, as can some task and socio-emotional roles, but the model – with its separate categories – will be useful enough for our purposes.

We will look at norms shortly, but for now let's examine roles.

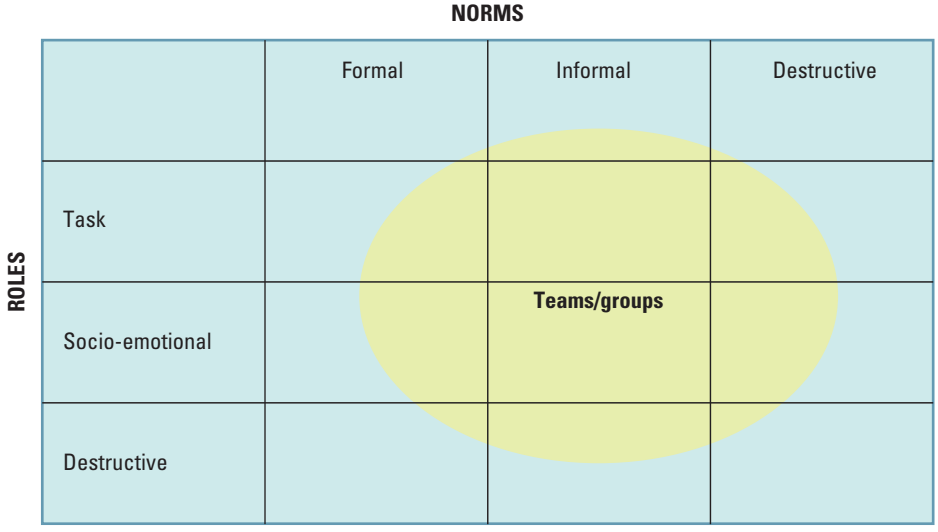


FIGURE 18.5 The roles/norms model of group/team formation

Role: an expected behaviour

A **role** is an expected behaviour (Hodgetts & Hegar 2007). An actor plays a role on stage or in front of the camera, but we all play roles in our day-to-day lives. Roles can also be thought of as ways of thinking, perceiving and acting. Perhaps these roles are inborn, or perhaps we acquire them along the way. The concept of a role helps explain others and ourselves. De Bono (2009) suggests that group members should improve their problem-solving abilities by consciously role-playing, or 'wearing different hats'. De Bono's hats include:

- the *white hat* for rational thinking
- the *red hat* for emotions and intuition
- the *black hat* for looking at things cautiously, pessimistically and defensively
- the *yellow hat* for positive thinking
- the *green hat* for creativity.

Process control is used by a chairperson or a group leader to use authority to 'change hats' when needed (see also 'Is logic enough?' in chapter 12).

In analysing many groups – the management task force, the counter staff in a bank, the group of friends in a car, the voluntary charity committee, the car assembly plant team, the sporting team – it is useful to distinguish between three types of roles:

- Task roles
- Socio-emotional roles
- Destructive roles.

Task role: relates to the functional or technical nature of work

Task roles are played by people when they are concerned solely with getting the job done. When we say that a particular person is adopting a particular task role, then we are considering this person and his or her work from a functional viewpoint. We are more concerned with the quality and the quantity of the output than we are with his or her feelings, values and perceptions. Belbin (2010), for example, discusses task roles played in groups (resource investigator, monitor–evaluator, implementer, completer–finisher and so on).

Socio-emotional role: relates to the interpersonal aspects of work

Socio-emotional roles (or maintenance roles) are played by people when they are communicating feelings, values and opinions about the task, and about the world beyond the task.

Destructive role: causes conflict and ineffectiveness in work situations

Destructive roles are played by people when they – consciously or unconsciously – wish to sabotage the efforts of the group. All destructive roles have a foundation in reality – sometimes it pays to shelve problems, sometimes other group members are victimising an individual – but destructive role-players move way beyond a rational assessment of what is really going on as they wreak havoc.

Figure 18.6 shows some task, socio-emotional and destructive roles played in groups, and a detailed analysis of these roles is given in table 18.1. (Note that some of these roles appear in different guises in other areas of this book.)

Task roles	Socio-emotional roles	Destructive roles
■■ Brainstormer ■■ Expert ■■ Judge ■■ Devil's advocate ■■ Representative ■■ Implementer ■■ Ringmaster ■■ Memory	■■ Encourager ■■ Peacemaker ■■ Tension reliever ■■ Confronter	■■ Husher ■■ Personaliser ■■ Recognition seeker ■■ Victim ■■ Blocker ■■ Shelver ■■ Distractor ■■ Aggressor ■■ Shadow ■■ Special-interest pleader

FIGURE 18.6 Roles played in groups

We need to bear in mind the following aspects of role formation and execution in groups:

- Sometimes people play only one type of role in both work and personal situations; sometimes people play the same type of multiple roles in both work and personal situations; and sometimes people play quite different roles in work and personal situations.
- Effective groups show a healthy mix of task and socio-emotional role-playing, and a minimal amount of destructive role-playing.
- Effective groups understand that all roles have strengths and weaknesses, and that maximum synergy is created when the mix of strengths is brought to the fore and the mix of weaknesses is kept under control.
- Sometimes groups can solve problems more effectively by letting people who are playing different roles assume dominance or leadership in a sequence or in phases – for example, a Brainstormer–Expert–Judge–Devil's advocate–Representative–Implementer sequence.
- Too much emphasis on task roles may lead to an over-emphasis on facts, and not enough weight given to opinion and feeling (which can be as important, and sometimes more important, than facts).
- Too much emphasis on socio-emotional roles may lead to a lack of emphasis on facts and not enough concern with producing real outcomes from the group.
- There should be a good mix of roles played, otherwise too many group members playing the one role may lead to a group having blind spots, and thus making bad decisions.

TABLE 18.1 Analysis of roles played in groups

Task roles			
Role	**Verbal behaviour**	**Nonverbal behaviour**	**Analysis**
Brainstormer	■■ *Hey, what about …* ■■ *I'm really excited about …* ■■ *No, don't judge; not yet anyway.* ■■ *We've possibly got ourselves into this mess because we're too conventional.* ■■ *We're too close to it. We need lateral thinking here, not vertical.*	■■ Jumps up, writes on board or flip chart ■■ Jerky, explosive movements ■■ Animated face, eyes ■■ Touches others	■■ Invaluable when team needs new ideas (i.e. all the time) ■■ Not necessarily good at execution (i.e. a starter, not a finisher) ■■ Possibly a short concentration span ■■ Might be disorganised ■■ Good at finding things and concepts; good at losing them too ■■ Might need to have creativity channelled via structure, goals; ask for ideas in writing where possible ■■ May need to be protected from more 'practical' members of team

(continued)

TABLE 18.1 *(continued)*

Task roles			
Role	**Verbal behaviour**	**Nonverbal behaviour**	**Analysis**
Expert	■■ *Here are the facts/data.* ■■ *My presentation begins with …* ■■ *I presume you've all read my report/ memo on …*	■■ Serious, methodical, restrained ■■ Precise hand gestures; folds hands, points at diagrams, charts ■■ Slightly impatient, waiting to be asked to go into action	■■ Not emotional ■■ Thinks that the pure beauty of ideas is obvious to everyone ■■ Impatient with politics; doesn't understand compromise, lobbying or the necessity to repeat a good idea over and over ■■ May be intolerant of Brainstormer's 'messiness' or emotional communication
Judge	■■ *We've got conflicting opinions here.* ■■ *Let's weigh up the pros and cons.* ■■ *What's the practicality/logic?* ■■ *Maybe we should sleep on it, and look at it later. It might benefit from some benign neglect.* ■■ *Maybe we should put together a compromise package of parts of all proposals.*	■■ Evaluative (e.g. biting glasses arm or pen, narrowing of eyes, chin-stroking) ■■ Laying-down-the-law-type hand-chop ■■ Counting on fingers in discussing alternatives ■■ Gestures with one hand, then the other ('on the one hand and on the other')	■■ Can work with Experts from differing fields ■■ Might be an enemy of Brainstormer by forcing premature closure on decisions
Devil's advocate	■■ *I can see a lot of good here, but let's look at it from the opposition's point of view.* ■■ *Do we have any blind spots here?* ■■ *What's the worst-case scenario? What can go horribly wrong? Let's not forget Murphy's Law.*	■■ Sits back in chair; remains restrained even when ideas are flying and enthusiasm is high ■■ Takes notes	■■ Necessary to prevent groupthink syndrome ■■ Vital that this role be rotated, otherwise there is the danger of Devil's advocate simply becoming a Blocker
Representative	■■ *The union/management won't like parts of this.* ■■ *I'll make a few calls.* ■■ *I'll do some press releases, take X and Y to lunch and give them some background.*	■■ Shares some behaviour of Judge, Devil's advocate and Implementer (evaluation, detachment, alertness)	■■ A liaison with outside interests and stakeholders ■■ A boundary spanner ■■ A negotiator, a fixer ■■ Might have divided loyalties
Implementer	■■ *Can do.* ■■ *Sure!* ■■ *Okay!* ■■ *I'll have a draft back to this group in a week.* ■■ *There are ways and means.* ■■ *Leave it to me.*	■■ Alert ■■ Shuffles, arranges papers ■■ Makes notations ■■ Looks at watch ■■ Writes in diary ■■ Uses calculator/laptop computer	■■ A master of details ■■ A fixer ■■ Can become impatient, however, and might force team to premature closure
Ringmaster	■■ *That's quite interesting, X, but I think we'll handle it as a separate item under 'general business' on the agenda.* ■■ *We seem to have reached an impasse. Let me see if I can summarise the differing viewpoints we've heard so far.* ■■ *That's out of line, Y. Please stick to discussing item 6, otherwise A and B can have the floor.*	■■ Works through agenda papers with pen ■■ May have hand over mouth while others are speaking ■■ Looks around table to watch for cues indicating who would like to speak ■■ Confers with secretary/note-taker	■■ Can act as chairperson in meetings ■■ Ideally, should have no strong opinions on matters under discussion (perfect neutrality is, of course, impossible) ■■ It is useful to know his/her real opinions in case a casting vote is needed

Task roles			
Role	**Verbal behaviour**	**Nonverbal behaviour**	**Analysis**
Memory	■■ *Excuse me, Y, how do you spell that?* ■■ *[Silence]*	■■ Head down	■■ Can act as secretary in meetings ■■ The collective memory and handler of mechanics: minutes, agendas, setting of agendas, checking up to see that people have followed through on items covered in the last agenda
Socio-emotional roles			
Role	**Verbal behaviour**	**Nonverbal behaviour**	**Analysis**
Encourager	■■ *Before we go any further, I think we should hear from X. She's been telling me her opinions, and I think there's a lot in them. X? The floor is yours.* ■■ *No, no, I don't think that's what X meant at all. I think she was saying … Have I got that right, X, or have I missed your point?*	■■ Smile, nod ■■ Head tilted to one side, listening ■■ Open palms	■■ Draws out reticent, protects the weak ■■ Supports Ringmaster ■■ A good listener
Peacemaker	■■ *Let's go back a few steps, J. You agree that … right? And, S, you also agree that … right?* ■■ *Yes, I understand that you disagree with … but my notes show that you agree with … Okay?*	■■ Orients towards person with hot temper ■■ Gestures with palms open or up ■■ Eyebrows up (questioning)	■■ Consensus-seeker, diplomat; knows that there may be no permanent solution to the problem under discussion ■■ Knows that tempers may cool if team takes a break; may thus propose adjournment when conflict peaks
Tension reliever	■■ *Time for coffee/lunch, I think.* ■■ *Hey, I didn't know World War III had been declared!* ■■ *[Uses puns/jokes]*	■■ Pulls faces ■■ Smiles, laughs ■■ Animated face, body ■■ Expansive gestures ■■ Plays with pens, cups ■■ Doodles	■■ Good at breaking the ice in initial phases of meetings ■■ Good at defusing conflict with humour ■■ Needs to know how not to go too far in going too far; otherwise clowning will irritate people, and will be counterproductive ■■ Similar to Brainstormer, but not as creative in transforming facts into ideas
Confronter	■■ *No, we can't smooth this over.* ■■ *There's a hidden agenda here; there are too many undercurrents in this group. We need to get this out in the open before we go any further.* ■■ *No, I disagree. We shouldn't just stick to the facts. Facts can be twisted to suit any opinion. We need opinions, and we need honest opinions. No more playing games.*	■■ Assertive/aggressive manner ■■ Palm out in 'stop' gesture ■■ Negative cross-fanning of hands	■■ More assertive than aggressive ■■ Not all conflict is bad; the Confronter is useful when conflict is being avoided, when group pussyfoots around hard decisions ■■ Enemy of 'weak' consensus (i.e. taking the path of least resistance) ■■ Similar to Devil's advocate, except that Confronter is more concerned with opinions and feelings than facts

(continued)

TABLE 18.1 *(continued)*

Destructive roles			
Role	**Verbal behaviour**	**Nonverbal behaviour**	**Analysis**
Husher	■■ *Tsk, tsk.* ■■ *Shh . . .* ■■ *Let's not have any more of this unpleasantness.* ■■ *I'm getting a headache*	■■ Rapid head nods ■■ Palms out, palms down; calming, hushing, placating gestures ■■ Nervous posture; squirms ■■ Sickly smile ■■ Head-shaking ■■ Index finger to lips, and in reprimanding, negating gestures ■■ Blushing	■■ Wishes to avoid conflict at all costs ■■ The appearance of harmony is all-important to the Husher ■■ Unwittingly aids other, more manipulative types in suppressing real discussion
Personaliser	■■ *This is a roundabout way of attacking me, isn't it?* ■■ *Why are you always attacking stuff from my area?* ■■ *Humphh!*	■■ Hands to chest, thumb to chest ■■ Higher pitch in voice ■■ Wide open, staring eyes ■■ Crossed arms, orientation away from group after outburst	■■ Alternates between aggressive/fight and submissive/flight behaviour ■■ Feels that world is out to get him/her: the most innocent remarks from others are seen as an attack on the Personaliser's self ■■ If this is continued long enough, the perceived will become the real; paranoia will become objective, and people will perceive such a person in a different way, and therefore will behave differently towards them
Recognition seeker	■■ *It's funny that this should come up, you know. Something similar, well, not quite similar, happened to me about two years ago. I wrote about it in my half-yearly report. I'm sure you all remember?* ■■ *[Loud laughter, drawing people's attention and stopping discussion]* ■■ *You know, we've been working on this for quite some time in my section. Let me fill you in on the details.*	■■ Self-confident, smug ■■ Suddenly leans forward at point of interruption ■■ Fidgets ■■ May be flamboyant in dress	■■ Has a short concentration span; is bored with most things, especially when he/she is not the centre of attention ■■ Similar to the Personaliser, in that he/she insists on relating the most unrelated matters back to self; unlike the Personaliser, however, the Recognition seeker is quite happy about this
Victim	■■ *I've really mucked this one up. Anyone got any bright ideas?* ■■ *Sorry. I guess I've let the team down again.* ■■ *We're just crumpling under pressure down in my section. We can't cope.* ■■ *It's a no-win situation, again.*	■■ Drooping, slumped posture ■■ Peaked eyebrows, wrinkled brow ■■ Shakes head ■■ Entwines, disentwines legs ■■ Appealing to others with eyes, hands	■■ Everyone fails from time to time; at least a mistake indicates that someone stopped talking long enough to do something. The Victim, however, fails all the time, apparently having made the life decision that if praise is not available, then disapproval, or even punishment, is okay. Victims eventually get their wish. ■■ A type of masochistic Recognition seeker
Blocker	■■ *It'll never work.* ■■ *What a mess.* ■■ *I don't know why we bother.* ■■ *It's never been done before.*	■■ Crossed arms ■■ Theatrical sighs ■■ Contemptuous looks	■■ Has one way to say yes, and a million ways to say no ■■ Negative and destructive in approach; everything is a problem

Destructive roles			
Role	**Verbal behaviour**	**Nonverbal behaviour**	**Analysis**
Blocker *(continued)*	■■ *We tried that before, and it didn't work.* ■■ *It can't happen under the 1963 standing orders, and therefore it's not gonna happen.*	■■ Rolls eyes ■■ Shakes head ■■ Orientates body away	■■ Enamoured of red tape ■■ Confronter or Devil's advocate gone wrong
Shelver	■■ *Shouldn't we defer this?* ■■ *Is this the best place to discuss this?* ■■ *I don't know, I still think we need more information.*	■■ Whining voice ■■ Looks very worried ■■ Looks at watch/clock ■■ Looks as though he/she wants to be somewhere else	■■ A procrastinator and an avoider ■■ Sometimes delaying things can be wise, but the Shelver always wants to put things off ■■ Less aggressive than the Blocker, but just as effective in frustrating action
Distractor	■■ *[Whispers a lot]* ■■ *Psst!* ■■ *Anyway, she said . . . he said . . .*	■■ Passes notes ■■ Winks ■■ Nudges ■■ Yawns ■■ Looks everywhere but at agenda	■■ Short concentration span ■■ Treats all meetings as social occasions ■■ Doesn't necessarily want to be elsewhere, because a lot of gossip items may come up here ■■ Similar to Recognition seeker in producing terminally trivial and silly behaviour but does not want so high a profile
Aggressor	■■ *God! What a lot of garbage you're talking!* ■■ *That's typical of the gutless, incompetent nonsense we've come to expect of you!* ■■ *What kickback are you going to get from this?* ■■ *Tsk, tsk, tsk.*	■■ Glares ■■ Bares teeth ■■ Points ■■ Shakes fist ■■ Crosses arms ■■ Shakes head ■■ Broad, dismissive gestures ■■ Loud exhalation of air; expressing disgust	■■ Very hostile ■■ Suspicious of people's motives ■■ Dominates, and often wins
Shadow	■■ *[Says nothing]*	■■ Sits back from table ■■ Frightened or impassive	■■ Never says anything ■■ Is not quite clear why he/she is there ■■ May have some good things to say, but is dominated by others ■■ Needs an Encourager, or needs to be taken out of the group ■■ May in fact be acting rationally; may be an example of organisational silence — one shadow can suggest that she/he has a problem; more than one may suggest that the group or organisation has a problem
Special-interest pleader	■■ *Yes, all very well, but what about the small businessman/poor/housewives/ big companies staggering under the tax burden/data-processing department?*	■■ Sermonising tone of voice ■■ Looks around table at others while talking intently	■■ Draws all topics back to special interest, no matter how irrelevant the connection may be ■■ A Representative gone wrong ■■ The Personaliser operating at a collective level

ASSESS YOURSELF

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various roles?
2. What is the ideal balance of task and socio-emotional roles?
3. To what extent should a Ringmaster play some or all of the socio-emotional roles?
4. Are the roles that people play an expression of deep-seated and unchangeable character, or are roles more superficial than this?
5. Do people play more than one role in the same group? Do they play different roles in different groups?
6. What other roles might there be?

Norms

You may recall that our definition of a group is that it consists of people with shared norms and interlocking roles. Norms are standards of customary behaviour and can be translated as 'rules' (Flynn & Chatman 2003; Mannix & Jehn 2004; Hogg & Reid 2006; Dydejcsyk, Kułakowski & Ryback 2009). Therefore one way to define groups is: Roles + Rules (Norms) = Groups.

Formal norm: an explicit rule-governing behaviour
Informal norm: an implicit rule-governing behaviour

We can distinguish between **formal norms** and **informal norms** in groups. Formal norms are those rules that are explicit in the way they define the group's behaviour; whereas informal norms are implicit in the way they define the group's behaviour. Figure 18.7 shows samples of a factory work group's formal and informal norms.

Formal norms	Informal norms
Workers show up at the factory on time.	Workers often refer to each other by nicknames.
Workers must observe safety regulations.	Some workers engage in practical jokes and horseplay.
Workers in this group have lunch in the cafeteria from 12.45 to 1.30 pm.	Workers in this group always sit at the one table and always drink three cups of coffee.

FIGURE 18.7 Formal and informal norms

Sources: Adapted from Grasha (1997); Hepner (1979).

In work situations, formal norms are usually laid down by management and represent the formal organisation (depicted on an organisation chart); whereas informal norms are usually laid down by the group of nonmanagement employees and represent the informal organisation. Both organisations coexist, often uneasily, and sometimes in a state of open conflict. The system of communication for the informal organisation is known as the grapevine.

Rules, whether formal or informal, have to be enforced. Enforcement of formal norms is straightforward, whereas enforcement of informal norms is usually more subtle. The conflict between informal and formal group norms, and the means by which one is enforced at the expense of the other, are complex phenomena. Work groups often have clearly defined informal norms, such as:

- You don't dob on (report on) your mates to your superiors
- A fair day's work around here is *x* amount of output.
- We trust each other a lot, and we can try out weird and wonderful ideas on the group without getting laughed at.
- We don't express too much emotion when discussing things.

- This group's output is a cut above what the others deliver, and we like it like that.
- We don't like working with women (men).

Such norms can be negative and punitive, or positive and rewarding. All have the unstated function of preserving the group and its collective self-esteem. If anyone deviates from these norms, they may be punished by various group behavioural mechanisms, such as ostracism ('sent to Coventry', 'freeze out') or ridicule ('Ratebuster!', 'Conch!' for overachievers; 'Goldbricker!', 'Bludger!' for underachievers).

In 1948 a classic study was done of group norm behaviour in a North American pyjama manufacturing plant (Coch & French 1948). At this plant, the informal group norm for productivity in a group of pressers was about 50 items a day. A new worker entered the group and, after a few days' learning, began to exceed the group norm (figure 18.8).

The rest of the group began to scapegoat or punish the newcomer deviating from the norm, so that after some days, the deviant conformed, and in fact over-conformed by producing slightly less than the group norm. After 20 days the group had to be split up, and even though all other workers were transferred elsewhere, the scapegoated worker remained. Her output rate increased dramatically, freed as she was from the restrictive group norm.

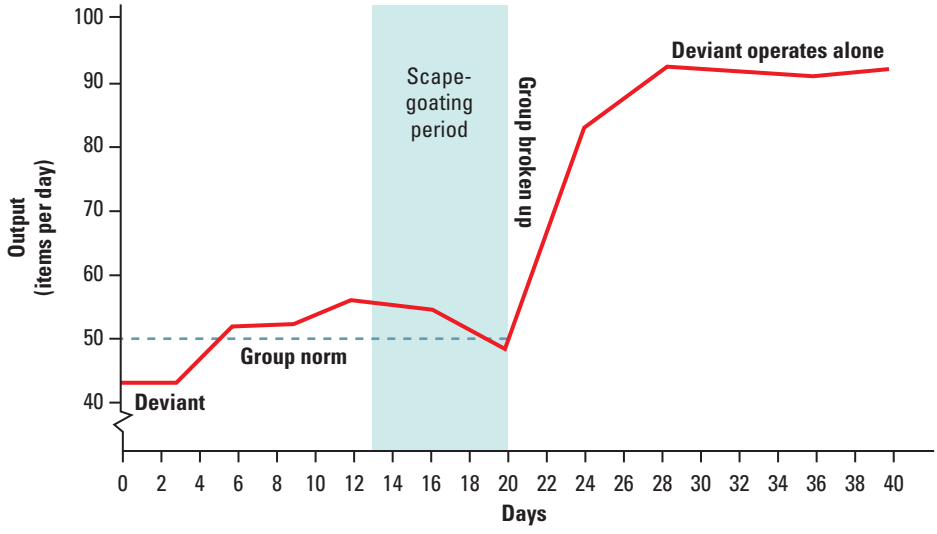


FIGURE 18.8 Group norms and deviant performance in a pyjama factory

Sources: Adapted from Coch and French (1948); Hepner (1979).

Similar dynamics of exclusion were observed in a German workplace in the 1990s, where a group member had higher qualifications and received a higher pay rate. The group expressed displeasure, and the woman considered returning to her former workstation. She didn't, but another woman was discouraged from seeking higher qualifications (Minssen 2005).

Informal group norms

The Coch and French findings have fascinating implications for the design of jobs, motivation, piecework and group dynamics concepts such as conformity and cohesiveness. It is sometimes concluded that:

- Data like that of the pyjama factory study prove that informal group norms are dangerous things, ruining organisational productivity and providing resistance to change.
- If managements could only destroy informal groups by getting workers to participate more in the running of the organisation — for example, by setting up semi-autonomous workgroups, or teams — then things would be better all round, for both management and workers.

However, when groups preserve informal norms that conflict with formal ones, group members are not being altogether dumb, nor are they necessarily neurotic or just plain cranky. If a work group were to lift its production norm to the maximum, will there be guarantees that additional profits generated will be shared proportionately among management and labour, and that the higher than normal output won't lead to staff being laid off? If such guarantees were given, then labour and management could work in more harmonious alliance.

Unfortunately, many work restructuring schemes have, in fact, led to staff being laid off (Kelly 1981), rather than the organisation increasing its marketing of its new high output, or retraining workers for other jobs. Viewed in this light, informal group norms that hold down output seem to be rational, counter-punching behaviour.

Managements within organisations also have their own formal and informal norms, some of which lead to what one would hope for and expect – high productivity – but some of which lead to the opposite outcome. A group of manufacturers may cause production to be artificially low because of cartelisation, administered prices, vertical and horizontal integration, a 'why should we bother, we're okay' culture, and so on. Professional groups may also have norms of holding down outputs – what peer-group pressures would there be on a doctor or a lawyer if they began to cut their prices, for example?

The trick is to break out of such a dilemma, and see that the formal and informal norms of high productivity depend on the formal and informal norms of high trust and open communication. Likert (1967), for example, suggests that the informal organisation or grapevine will simply wither away if genuine participation in decision making and empowerment becomes the norm in an organisation.

Destructive norms: groupthink and the Abilene paradox

We sometimes think that groups can make bad decisions because of conflicts within the group – that is, the group is not cohesive and is lacking in supportive socio-emotional norms. This is sometimes the case, but it is also true that sometimes highly cohesive groups make bad decisions. Such groups often make bad decisions because of **groupthink** (Janis 1982, 1989; Kowert 2002; Chapman 2006; Solomon 2006; Halbesleben, Wheeler & Buckley 2007).

Groupthink: a pattern of defective decision making seen in groups

Janis argued that groupthink occurs in five stages (figure 18.9).

The paradox with groupthink is that the groups it afflicts are usually quite pleasant company to work with: the 'we' feeling is very high, and group members often like each other a lot. In fact, the more cohesive the group, the greater the chance of groupthink occurring. The groupthink model was originally used to explain US foreign policy decision making under Presidents Roosevelt (Pearl Harbor), Kennedy (Bay of Pigs, Cuban missile crisis) and Johnson (Vietnam) (Janis 1982), but has subsequently been used to analyse a much broader range of areas. It has also been applied in analyses of:

- the 1972–73 Watergate crisis under President Nixon (Raven & Rubin 1983)
- the invasion of Iraq in 2003 led by President George W. Bush (Yetiv 2004; Kemper 2004; Woodward 2006; Fitsimmons 2008; Mackenzie 2010; Post & Panis 2011).
- the psychological mechanisms that could trigger a third world war (Thompson 1985)
- the space shuttle *Challenger* disaster of 1986 (Moorhead, Ference & Neck 1991)
- the performance of self-managing teams and organisational projects (Moorhead, Neck & West 1998; Haslam et al. 2006; Halbesleben, Wheeler & Buckley 2007; Hede 2007)
- the overmedication of 'difficult' patients in hospitals (Degnin 2009)
- the global financial crisis that began in 2008 (Schiller 2008).

In 1961, for example, President Kennedy and his group of advisers unwisely decided to support a CIA-planned invasion of Cuba by anti-Castro rebels. The Bay of Pigs invasion was a disaster. All the mechanisms of groupthink contributed to this negative outcome – the

perception that the enemy was weak and incompetent; the norm of suppressing feelings, intuitions and criticism; the fear of being seen as weak if expressing criticism of the military option; the dominance of forceful, aggressive personalities such as Robert Kennedy; the exclusion of alternative data, and so on.

Similar dynamics were observed in the 2003 decision of US President George W. Bush to invade Iraq (the illusion of invulnerability, critics being excluded from important meetings). Schiller, in predicting what was to become the global financial crisis beginning in 2008, was a policy insider, but could not go along with the groupthink feeling that the financial system was stable, and almost succumbed to self-censorship, a groupthink symptom: 'I distinctly remember that, while writing this (a warning that catastrophic collapses of stock and housing markets was on its way), I feared criticism for gratuitous alarmism. And indeed, such criticism came.' (Schiller 2008)

	Stage	Characteristics
I	Antecedents	1. High levels of cohesiveness. 2. Structural defects — insulation, lack of leader impartiality, lack of procedural norms, and member homogeneity (everyone is like everyone else in values, cognitive style). 3. Provocative situational contexts — group efficacy, high stress.
II	Concurrence seeking	Group members openly agree with the perceived group position even if a group member privately disagrees — there is a need to be seen to 'be a team player', or not to 'rock the boat' or cause disruption.
III	Symptoms	1. *Illusion of invulnerability*. The group believes it is invulnerable, which leads to excessive optimism and risk taking. 2. *Rationalisation*. Group members rationalise away warnings or threats. 3. *Belief in inherent morality*. Group members believe that their decisions are inherently moral, brushing away thoughts of unethical behaviour by saying 'How could we do anything wrong?' 4. *Stereotyping*. Opponents of the group are stereotyped as being too evil, stupid or weak to be taken seriously. 5. *Direct pressure*. Anyone foolhardy enough to question the status quo within the group has direct pressure applied to conform. 6. *Self-censorship*. Group members with doubts censor themselves to preserve the appearance of consent. 7. *Illusion of unanimity*. Because silence is interpreted as consent, there is an illusion of unanimity. 8. *Mindguards*. Just as bodyguards protect us from physical harm, so some people set themselves as mindguards (censors or gatekeepers) in order to prevent challenging or threatening information available outside the group from appearing before the group.
IV	Decision-making defects	1. Incomplete survey of alternatives. 2. Incomplete survey of objectives. 3. Failure to examine risks associated with the preferred choice. 4. Poor information search. 5. Selective bias in processing information. 6. Failure to reappraise alternatives. 7. Failure to provide contingency plans.
V	Poor decision outcomes	Groupthink occurs. Almost certainly, a bad decision will be made when all previous factors are present. Sometimes groups in the grip of groupthink will still make a decision, especially when a leader advocates a good decision, but this is infrequent.

FIGURE 18.9 Stages in the groupthink process

Source: Adapted from Janis (1982, 1989).

The same group made better decisions the following year at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, employing a number of anti-groupthink techniques (see table 18.2 opposite and overleaf): other decision makers were invited to provide fresh perspectives; and Kennedy deliberately excluded himself from some meetings so that his presence would not lead to suppression of ideas or self-censorship (emphasising the role of power and status in discouraging others from speaking out; see Islam & Zyphur 2005). Interestingly, each person was further sanctioned by the President to be a critical evaluator or 'devil's advocate' of all presented ideas.

Eaton (2001) has noted groupthink dynamics in the tendency of organisations to treat competitors and even customers as idiots (the British store chain Marks and Spencer underestimating its 'downmarket' rival Tesco's; British Airways underestimating its rival Virgin airlines; IBM underestimating the power of the personal computer versus its 'big iron' or mainframe computers; Daimler-Benz dismissing concerns about the stability of its A-Class car after it failed the 'moose test').

Ko (2005) has analysed specific Chinese cultural patterns in Hong Kong businesses, such as status, face, trust, friendship and Guanxi (networks), and has found a correlation between groupthink and status of individuals in decision-making groups (note the remarks about US President Kennedy deliberately absenting himself from meetings so that his status would not swamp objective discussion and decision making).

All groups – whether political cabinets and ministries, ametuer or professional sporting teams, charity fundraising committees, teenage gangs or work groups – can be susceptible to groupthink.

The Abilene paradox

Abilene paradox: The behavioural effect which occurs when organisations and individuals frequently take actions in contradiction to what they really want to do and therefore defeat the very purposes they are trying to achieve

A variation on the groupthink model has been developed by Jerry Harvey, which he calls the **Abilene paradox** (Harvey 1996; Kim 2001; McManus 2006; Halbesleben, Wheeler & Buckley 2007; McAvoy & Butler 2009). The name comes from a journey Harvey and his family took through blistering heat to go to the town of Abilene, Texas, to eat at a restaurant. Upon returning home, all four family members discovered that none of them had really wanted to go, but each went along, presuming that everyone else wanted to go.

In such circumstances, we make bad decisions, not so much due to actual group tyranny and conformity pressures as to our own perceptions or anxiety about being alone – and about being separated from others by exclusion or ostracism. Harvey notes, for example, that a number of President Nixon's staff who participated in the Watergate hotel break-in in 1972 didn't really want to do it, but thought that everyone else did. As one participant said, '[I] … drifted along … because of the fear of the group pressure that would ensue, of not being a team player'.

The Abilene paradox then is: 'Organisations frequently take actions in contradiction to what they really want to do and therefore defeat the very purposes they are trying to achieve' (Harvey 1988).

The essential symptom that defines organisations caught in the paradox is that they are unable to *manage agreement*, rather than unable to *manage conflict* – because most agree with each other, rather than disagree, but all are operating in a fog of pluralistic ignorance. While the groupthink and Abilene paradox models vary in different ways (see figure 18.10 in the next section), they both create the same result: bad, sometimes disastrous, decisions made by people in groups.

So, how can groupthink and the Abilene paradox be avoided? There are numerous ways, most of which will be uncomfortable for group members, but some or all of which may be necessary. They are all concerned with expanding the focus of decision making, reducing or modifying the cohesiveness of the group, and reducing the risk of speaking out within the group. These approaches are summarised in table 18.2.

TABLE 18.2 Reducing the effects of groupthink and the Abilene paradox

Approach	Rationale
Examine alternatives, generate contingency plans	Don't be trapped into thinking that there's only one solution. Insist that multiple solutions be proposed for problems. Always have a plan B and, preferably, a plan C and plan D.
Appoint devil's advocate	A devil's advocate is empowered by the group to always present a critical, worst-case scenario without the group thinking any the worse of that person. Role needs to be rotated.
Increase group size, heterogeneity	Break the cosy dynamics of the group by making it bigger, and introduce people who are from different backgrounds, with differing opinions and problem-solving styles and who may challenge the consensus and expose the blind spots of an over-homogeneous group.
Remove physical isolation	Physically reintegrate the group with the rest of the organisation. Break down over-territorial 'us-and-them' or 'silo' mentality.
Do external reality checking	Stay in touch with suppliers, dealers, stakeholders and customers; use boundary spanners within organisation to bring back intelligence, rumours.
Facilitate organisational graffiti	Officially sanction space on organisational computer system for a graffiti bulletin board or intranet where people may anonymously input unpopular ideas and heresies for all to consider. Possibly dangerous, but less dangerous than trying to suppress the grapevine.
Eliminate competition with other groups	Break down 'us-and-them' mentality by social occasions, forcing groups to work together, exchanging and rotating personnel between groups.
Make confronters into heroes	Going beyond the devil's advocate. Instead of shooting messengers, reward them. Very painful, but less painful than the alternative, usually arrived at when someone says, 'How did we get into this mess?' If assertively confronting role models exist, and are rewarded (or at the very least, are not punished) then there will be more assertive confrontation. See Roberto (2009) with his view that great managers 'Don't take yes for an answer.'
Create multiple affiliations	Have group members report to more than one boss and interact with other areas, departments and teams. Expose them to other views and give them other supports they could fall back on if they fall out of favour with the main group.
Use special techniques (e.g. nominal group techniques)	Nominal group techniques reduce group pressures to conform by allowing members to anonymously contribute ideas in writing.
Provide training for group members	Boost group members' confidence and ability through training in technical skills, self-leadership and interpersonal skills such as feedback, questioning, listening and reframing.

(continued)

TABLE 18.2 *(continued)*

Approach	Rationale
Defer finality in decisions	Have a second-chance meeting, where decisions can be reviewed before committing to them.
Manage impact of high-status members	The presence of high-status group members can impair decision making when others feel intimidated or try to impress. It may help if such people absent themselves from some meetings.
Give higher priority to socio-emotional factors	Change the group norm so that it becomes more acceptable to express intuitions, hunches, gut feelings, vibes and misgivings.
Recruit young people with a broad perspective	Immerse them for the first six months in interdepartmental networking while they still have the protection given to newcomers.

Sources: Adapted from Janis (1982); Manz and Neck (1997); Moorhead, Neck and West (1998); Kim (2001); Schütz and Block (2006); Post and Panis (2011).

Silos: the clash of stereotypes

The in-group versus out-group dynamic present inside many organisations means that many subsections or silos of an organisation – departments, teams, divisions, units, colleges and centres – may focus more aggression, hostility and competition to those inside the organisation than to those outside the organisation. These dynamics are often aided and abetted by the groupthink and Abilene paradox phenomena. The organisation is a group of groups, and thus groupthink/Abilene may occur between groups.

These types of turf wars or territory spats are often driven by the gap between the self-perception of any one area or unit and the perceptions of that area or unit by other areas or units. These perceptions are often stereotypes (see table 18.3). If communication between different areas or silos does not occur, these stereotypes or clichés may turn into self-fulfilling prophecies (Schütz & Block 2006).

TABLE 18.3 Double vision in the silos: self-images and the perceptions of others

Area	Research	Production	Sales	Marketing
Self-perception	■■ Project-oriented and systematic ■■ The future of the enterprise depends on our innovation	■■ Cool, calculating engineers ■■ Because of us, production processes are stable, error-free	■■ Relationship managers ■■ Our performance is measurable and performance orientated	■■ Innovative; representative of clients ■■ Conceptual thinkers ■■ We nurture the enterprise's greatest asset: its brand
Perception of area by others	■■ Arrogant scientific types more interested in Nobel prizes and patents than profits ■■ Enemy of sales ■■ Techno freaks	■■ Machinists who are stuck in old ways of thinking ■■ Innovation blockers ■■ Quantity kings ■■ Dr No	■■ Wafflers ■■ Customer's buddies ■■ Price killers ■■ Incentive hunters ■■ Likely to promise the world but not deliver	■■ A lifeguard who never touches water ■■ Sprinkle unrealistic fantasies from their ivory tower over the sales troops ■■ Snooty verbal acrobat; obfuscator ■■ Cash burner ■■ PowerPoint artist

Source: Adapted from Schütz and Block (2006).

A reflection on destructive norms

So, considering what we have learned, especially about silos in an organisation and how the dynamics at play in the workplace can be characterised by groupthink and the Abilene paradox, what can we now take away? Take the time to consider figure 18.10, which compares the Abilene paradox with groupthink.

	Abilene paradox	Groupthink
Consciousness of participants	■■ Individuals want to do one thing but willingly — though in despair — do the opposite ■■ Absurdity of situation apparent from outset ■■ Makes people feel bad about good private decisions withheld from the group	■■ Group members often euphoric, enjoying high morale and sense of efficacy ■■ Absurdity not obvious until fog lifts ■■ Makes people feel good about bad public decisions
Immediate post-decision response	■■ Conflict, malaise	■■ Esprit de corps, optimistic views of the future, loyalty to organisation
Relevant unit of analysis	■■ Individual ■■ Group is less than sum of parts ■■ Individuals feel guilty	■■ Group ■■ Individuals become immersed in collective identity ■■ Group is more than the sum of parts ■■ Members may feel exonerated from individual responsibility
Presence of external threats	■■ No	■■ Often — induces stress and feelings of urgency which may impair rational examination of procedures and alternatives
Perception of coercion	■■ Yes — perception that to disagree would 'rock the boat'	■■ Not always — members may feel that they are deciding of their own free will
Individuals' attitude	■■ Passive	■■ Active

FIGURE 18.10 Groupthink and the Abilene paradox compared

Sources: Adapted from Taras (1991); Kim (2001); Harvey et al. (2004).

As we have explained, both of these models create the same result: bad, sometimes disastrous decisions made by people in groups. By self-reflection, employees can strive to identify if and when these norms occur in the workplace, and if there are inconsistencies or 'double vision' in the silos (refer back to table 18.3). Then, they can look to use some of the approaches outlined in table 18.2 to challenge the status quo and reduce the effects of these norms.

Stages of group development

Individuals develop through discernible stages or phases, and products and organisations are sometimes described as having life cycles. It may well be that groups develop, change and/or die in similar ways. It is possible to see patterns or stages in team development, and this can help us to determine just what is going on inside a team – particularly if things don't appear to be going all that well. For example, table 18.4 (overleaf) shows that groups may move through five stages or phases (Tuckman 1965; Tuckman & Jensen 1977; Miller 2003).

Tuckman's is perhaps the most famous of the stage, phase or sequence models, and has been widely used (Wheelan Davidson & Tilin 2003; Akan 2005; Akrivou & Boyatzis 2006; Birchmeier, Joinson & Dietz-Uhler 2005; Fall & Wejnert 2005; Mannix & Jehn 2004; Miller 2003; Chang, Duck & Bordia 2006).

TABLE 18.4 Stages of group development

Phase	What happens
1. Forming	■■ Getting to know you, ice-breaking stage ■■ Group members attempt to identify what tasks they should be working on ■■ Members also begin to develop a sense of the group's independence
2. Storming	■■ Socio-emotional responses to task demands come to the fore ■■ Conflicts over leadership, control and influence — who will be the 'star', and who is in charge? (See Overbeck, Correll & Park 2005.) ■■ Misunderstandings about role and style behaviour and norms, conflicting goals, poor feedback and listening, ineffective group decision-making and problem-solving processes
3. Norming	■■ Formal and informal norms emerge ■■ Cohesion begins to develop ■■ Opinions are now stated more readily and are received in a less defensive manner
4. Performing	■■ Balance of rules (norms) and roles emerge ■■ Synergy develops via positive role-playing (optimal mix of task and socio-emotional roles, with destructive role-playing under control) ■■ Group begins to produce solutions to the problems it is focusing on
5. Adjourning	■■ Group reaches closure on tasks ■■ Members may leave for a variety of reasons ■■ Destructive role-playing may become more prevalent

There are other stage, sequence or phase models, however, such as:

- Bales and Strodtbeck (1951): orientation, evaluation, control
- Hunt (1979): orientation, deliberation, conflict, emergence, trust, reinforcement
- Wheelan (1994): dependency and inclusion, counterdependence and flight, trust and structure, work, termination
- Jassawalla and Sashittal (2006): at-stakeness, transparency, mindfulness, synergy.

Groups don't always behave in such systematic ways, of course. For example:

- Many groups are 'immortal' – that is, the group lives on, even though membership may change. Some groups may never reach Tuckman's stage 5, or may be in stage 5 and not know it.
- Groups may in fact move back and forth between different stages.
- Sometimes groups self-destruct before reaching Tuckman's stages 3–5.
- Sometimes groups have no storming phase at all. That is, there is little or no conflict because cooperative spirit is greater than adversarial behaviour and/or rules/norms are already in place to regulate behaviour (White, McMillen & Baker 2001).

But do stages only go forward? What about groups or teams that fail, or dissolve, often in predictable stages? McGrew, Bilotta and Deeney (1999) argue for three possible extra stages or phases – de-norming, de-storming, and de-forming. De-norming occurs when drift sets in: 'changes in the team environment, in changes in project scope, size, or personnel' (McGrew, Bilotta & Deeney 1991, p. 231). The original storming phase begins with conflict, and proceeds to a gradual acceptance of new norms of co-operation. De-storming, paradoxically, means the return of the storm – the breaking down of positive norms and the re-emergence of negative norms and of conflict. De-forming begins when individuals argue over who should get credit for which unit of work or innovation. Individuals set up communication barriers between themselves, leaders and the rest of the organisation, with anger, apathy and disillusionment prevailing; leading to a dramatic drop in the team's performance. Other models of group development have been proposed which do not depend upon stages, sequences or phases, or at least not critically.

Poole and Roth (1989), for example, argue that many groups do not develop through tidy stages or phases, and in fact their actions are often characterised by disorganisation,

and taking action in different ways in different situations rather than simply reacting to an external environment (see also Arrow et al. 2004).

Gersick (1989) suggested that there are long periods in task group activity where nothing much happens, and then at the halfway point, inertia is overcome. She bases this on the evolutionary theory of punctuated equilibrium, which suggests that evolution is not a smooth upward curve progressing through discrete and universal phases, but rather is a series of plateaus punctuated by steep curves.

McGrath suggests that groups have modes of activity rather than stages or phases. Modes include goal choice (inception and acceptance of project), means choice (technical solution), policy choice (conflict resolution) and goal attainment (execution of performance) (McGrath 1991; McGrath, Arrow & Berdahl 2000), although these can form a sequence.

MYTHS ABOUT TEAMWORK

Amanda Sinclair

Look at any of the popular strategies for boosting organisational performance and you will find that using teams is in there somewhere . . . Better-quality teamwork is seen as crucial to organisational effectiveness. But wishful thinking has jeopardised our capacity to create it. Aggressively marketed organisational solutions have overstated the healing properties and success rates of teams.
The evidence about their effectiveness is nowhere near so clear-cut. Of course, no-one wants to advertise the failures — the time and resources wasted in teams which are the vehicles for personal agendas, or where they deteriorate into exercises for avoiding accountability. Even worse are the teams that tyrannise their members and severely impair individual work capacity. They can have high fall-out costs in personal and bottom-line terms.

The most important requirement in making teams work is to abandon our illusions, to scrutinise and learn from past mistakes. Only by owning up will we be able to evaluate what teams do best and how. Only then will we have a good chance of designing and participating in teams that work. There are five common illusions about teams.

Illusion 1: teams can do anything

Lingering from the 1960s and 1970s infatuation with human relations is the illusion that teams can do anything. The reality is that teams do some things very well and some things badly. Prospective team builders need to take a cold, hard look at what they really want a team to do. If it is to cover tracks, bury an issue under interminable meetings or give an appearance of consultation, then forget it.

Teams are not magic. They must have tasks that are achievable within a specified time frame. The team charged with 'management' has an impossible brief and will surely fail unless effort is spent spelling out what the management task involves and what constitutes success.

Neither are teams a cheap option. They inevitably consume resources and time. Teams rarely resolve conflict. More often, they pressure-cook it.

If an individual has the skills to do the job with the requisite creativity, then the individual, not the team, should do the job.

Teams should be considered only where there is a widely agreed case for their use. Teams are excellent devices for sharing skills and information creatively and they can coordinate big projects if the right people are team members.

Team tasks should also be relevant to present and future interests and skills of team members. If you want people to be committed to a team then it should have a personal career pay-off and not be seen as an onerous duty.

Illusion 2: good teams are purely task-oriented

A second illusion is that good teams focus only on the task.

Teams are there to get a job done. However, their existence as a group means that they have an emotional agenda as well as a task agenda.

(continued)

(continued)

They have a life cycle and momentum which determines when and under what circumstances the group will be likely to perform best and when it is vulnerable to diversion or disruption.

The emotional agenda is as powerful, if not more so, in determining how well the group does its job.

Teams need understanding of the emotional events that help and hinder performance, such as turnover of membership or lack of leadership.

They also need to experience achievement. An open-ended existence or indeterminate task can be offset by designing opportunities for feedback, ritual events and reporting schedules which enhance, not thwart, the team's momentum.

Illusion 3: teams don't need leaders

A third illusion is that leaders are not necessary in good teams.

Leadership is back in fashion. But people in teams often argue that good teamwork makes leadership redundant. Explicit or strong leadership behaviour is seen as contrary to the notional equality of teams.

This illusion and the lack of leadership it produces is one of the worst things that can happen to a team. It ensures an obsession with internal power relations and a team without a champion. A leader is the team's link with the wider organisation and the vital conduit for resources, support and credibility. Teams need help to understand how their leadership requirements change and how to make the most of the leadership resources distributed among members.

Illusion 4: everybody belongs in a team

Another illusory belief is that everyone can find a place in a team. Team mythology has it that everyone can find a productive role and that, with enough skill building, people can play many different roles, depending upon what is required. This is to deny all the psychological evidence that many personality types do their best work alone.

As with [sporting teams], no amounts of edicts from the coaches that 'you will be a team' will convert individualists into team players.

Illusion 5: teams are accountable

A final and controversial illusion is that teams can be held accountable. There is increasing attention to business ethics and the need to establish accountability for management actions. But how do you hold a team responsible? Teams are a time-honoured device for displacing responsibility and avoiding clear accountability. Bad decisions are put down to the members of the team who fall from favour.

Alternatively, if all the team members are to be held equally responsible, do you demand that they all resign or suffer penalties? This is hardly a practical solution, but it is frequently a political one.

Teams need to be designed with explicit recognition of where responsibility for their decisions and impacts lie. Teams have a better chance of being effective if they are a well-considered and well-resourced response to specific organisational requirements.

Source: This article appeared in full in *The Weekend Australian*.

Group or team?

We now have some basic ideas about the way in which groups develop. In many modern organisations, however, groups of workers are more likely to be called teams. Are 'group' and 'team' the same thing? Not necessarily. A team is probably (and the matter is still open for debate) a special case of a group:

- A team is a collection of people who must work interdependently to achieve a common goal or output, whereas a group is a collection of people who work together, but individual members may achieve individual goals while another member may not.
- Team members may differ from group members in that they are empowered or self-managing – that is, they may have decision-making power delegated to them, and thus not need leadership in the conventional sense.

- Team members may differ from group members in that they may experience more open and honest communication, they may have a greater sense of trust, they may accept conflict as normal, and they may feel more of a sense of ownership for their jobs and unit because they are committed to goals they helped establish (Maddux 1992).

We can very easily get stuck in wordplay here. 'Teams' has a very emotional, positive ring. Yet the 'empowered teams' and 'self-managing teams' of the 1990s and 2000s are not all that different from job design innovations in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the 'semi-autonomous work groups' pioneered in Scandinavia in the sociotechnical job design experiments, and the 'quality circle' movements developed in Japan, both of which involved (or in some cases only appeared to involve) a transfer of decision-making power from managers and supervisors to work group members (Grenier 1989; Pruijt 2003).

'Team building' is a distracting term. Strictly speaking, you can build a house, but how do you build a collection of human beings? 'Group development' might be a more accurate term for a process of unifying a collection of people so that they pursue goals with effectiveness, but it certainly sounds less exciting. (Team-building exercises, such as outdoor survival and cooperation training, are commonplace in many workplaces today, and yet the success rate of such activities is still problematic (Williams, Graham & Baker 2003; Keller & Olson 2000; Robbins & Finley 2001; Schütz & Bloch 2006). As Mieszkowski (2000) observed of a particularly painful US team-building exercise:

> But it was the night wandering around the mountain that led Damon, the executive recruiter with the painfully fractured shoulder, to what he described as an epiphany about the intersection of athletic team building and business. It seemed in the darkest hour, three teams, including Keen and Spencer Stuart, gave up the competition and worked together in their exhaustion and night blindness to find their way around. It made the whole experience more bearable and, yes, more fun. 'Sometimes it's better not to compete, but to cooperate even with your competitors, because the end result is better', Damon mused.

What people may mean when they use the term 'team' is simply 'effective group'. If they wish to use exciting terms like 'teams' and 'team building', and that excitement helps to motivate people to greater levels of effectiveness, then that should be okay. Groups and teams are sometimes seen as being more motivating, productive and emotionally healthy than the more traditional ways of organising human beings, but remember this is not always the case.

Organisational teams and sporting teams: the same or very different things?

When talking about work teams, the temptation to use sporting analogies or metaphors is almost irresistible (Keidel 1985; Torres & Spiegel 1990; Liu, Srivastava & Woo 1998; Smith 2006; Blanchard, Randolph & Grazier 2007).

Most of us first encounter the word 'team' in a sporting setting, and it is only logical we should project our experience and perception of sporting teams onto work teams. While there are undoubtedly some illuminating comparisons to be drawn, we should be careful about extending the analogy or metaphor, because the dissimilarities between work teams and sporting teams tend to outweigh the similarities (table 18.5; see overleaf).

TABLE 18.5 Comparison between work and sporting teams

Similarities	Dissimilarities
■■ Need for training and preparation ■■ Need for coordination and communication ■■ Goal setting needed for motivation and planning ■■ Exhortation can produce excitement, which can lead to better performance ■■ Working in unison, and synergy effects, can be very gratifying	■■ Goals are clear in sports teams; not always clear or may be multiple/contradictory in work teams ■■ In sport, it is unlikely that an individual can pursue goals separate from team; at work, it is possible (albeit undesirable) ■■ Rules are known in sport; rules can be official and unofficial at work ■■ Exhortation can wear a bit thin in work situations ■■ Time frames limited in sport; sometimes open-ended, multiple at work ■■ Stable information environment in sport: future is reasonably predictable; turbulent information environment at work: future is not always predictable ■■ Physical effort is crucial in sport; at work, mental effort only or mainly is increasingly the case ■■ Aggression is channeled in sport; at work, overt aggression is usually inappropriate ■■ Sports teams are an end in themselves (entertainment); work teams are a means to an end (products, services) ■■ Sports teams are collectively competitive; work teams are collaborative with other work teams ■■ Sports teams are usually culturally homogenous; work teams are usually culturally heterogeneous ■■ Members of sports teams are compensated differentially (superstars get super salaries); ideally, members of work teams get the same pay as everyone else

Sources: Adapted from Eunson (1987); Collier (1992); Robbins and Finley (2001).

Sports teams, work teams: the similarities

Let's talk about similarities first.

- Work teams and sporting teams are similar in that they both share needs to train and prepare before going into action, and they also share needs to coordinate and communicate when action is underway.
- Both types of teams can benefit from goal setting, which can not only lay a logical basis for planning, but can also be a motivator ('Why are we trying so hard? That's why we're trying so hard!').
- A coach can use exhortation to lift the morale of a sports team with a rallying speech, psyching the players up so that they will try just that much harder. A leader or manager of a work team can, under the right circumstances, obtain similar improvements in performance with the right kind of inspirational or visionary speech or conversation or memo.
- Finally, being within a team – sporting or working – where everyone is working together harmoniously, in unison, can be a very pleasant experience, and that experience is enhanced further when the team experiences synergy, or that state where the collective output jumps above the mere sum of the individual outputs.

Sports teams, work teams: the dissimilarities

There are, by contrast, many more dissimilarities than similarities when comparing sport teams to work teams.

- While goals are clear in sporting teams (sometimes they are literally goals), goals are not always clear in working teams, and indeed there may be multiple and contradictory goals within and between work teams.
- In sporting teams, it is quite difficult for an individual to have goals different from the team and to remain inside that team; in work teams, however, people's actions and intentions are less transparent, and it is possible for a nonconforming individual to have separate goals and yet stay inside the team. This is not always a good thing, although it sometimes can be. Organisations are rarely unitary structures where everyone pulls together, laudable as that end might be. It is more realistic to see organisations as pluralistic coalitions of forces and empires, or as a double structure comprising the formal organisation on the one hand, which communicates through official channels, and the informal organisation on the other hand, which communicates through the grapevine. The goals of these suborganisations coincide sometimes – sometimes often, but rarely always.
- 'Get out there and kill 'em – I know you can do it!' is fine in the locker room, and sometimes fine in the office or on the factory floor, but unless it is backed up with resources to do the job and rewards upon completion of the job, exhortation is not enough, and wears thin very quickly.
- In the workplace, time frames, rules and the information environment can be complex, ambiguous and unpredictable – unlike the tidy realities of the playing field.
- While the psychological game is increasingly important in sport, it is only so as a means to the end of improving physical performance. Yet the industrial revolutions of the past few centuries have meant that, in many workplaces, physical labour is irrelevant: it has been substantially replaced in many jobs by mental or intellectual labour, and it is quite difficult to know if the brain is sweating.

Aggression is normal in some sports, such as in AFL, boxing and rugby league, but physically aggressive behaviour is obviously inappropriate in team settings in the workplace.

- Similarly, aggression is normal within sport, and is usually kept under control within ritualised channels; in the workplace, however, aggression is usually inappropriate and its crudity as a force can be disastrously counter-productive, even when focused on outsiders like competitors. As Collier (1992, p. 10) remarks:

> Also, talk about sports teams often conjures up an image which focuses on physical strength and physical aggression. To use this image as being analogous to the business environment may result in an unspoken message that power plays and aggression are appropriate. This message could undermine the participative management style required especially for interdepartmental teams.

- Sports teams are an end in themselves – they are primarily about entertainment, and it is not always vital that they win. Work teams, in contrast, are merely a means to an end; namely, the production of products and services, and the consequences of 'losing' much or all of the time are far more serious.
- Aggression and competition are closely linked. Sports teams are collectively competitive, in that they compete with other teams in the same league or table or system. The name of the game for work teams, however, is to be collaborative, not competitive with other teams in their organisation.

- It is fairly common for sports teams to be culturally homogenous in terms of gender, age and race. Such homogeneity is seen less and less in the real world of work, where cultural and/or gender heterogeneity or diversity is more likely.
- Finally, to ensure equity and cooperation, it is probably wise to ensure that all work team members are paid the same, and in some circumstances, the pay may depend upon the collective group output. In the world of sport, by contrast, it is common for superstar players to get superstar salaries, so that there may be a wide range of pay within the sports team. This, of course, may be a source of grievance in sports teams, and in fact undermine the performance of a sports team, but it is nevertheless a reality (Robbins & Finley 2001).

Teams: strengths and weaknesses

The way in which teams make decisions and solve problems lies at the very heart of understanding effectiveness in teams. Are teams or groups effective or ineffective at making decisions and solving problems? Do 'too many cooks spoil the broth' (teams or groups are ineffective), or do 'many hands make light work' (teams and groups are effective)? Let's consider the good and the bad of teams.

Teams: the good news

There are many arguments for teams, including (and see table 18.6):

- Teams are good at generating many new ideas.
- They are also good at recalling information accurately. It would appear that the more minds there are present, the more ideas and memories can issue from them.
- Teams can deploy a multiplicity of task and socio-emotional roles that an individual would be hard-pressed to match (so long as destructive roles do not overwhelm the 'good' roles).
- Teams can make available a wide range of skills, contributions and experiences. They can present a wide range of cognitive styles, ensuring that blind spots (such as those an individual might have) do not distort perceptions. Of course, groups can have blind spots too, particularly if the group is over-homogeneous and lacking in alternative points of view.
- Teams can represent the advent of democracy in the workplace. If teams are genuinely empowered, then they can exercise the power formerly wielded by managers in autocratic organisations. This is not only ethically desirable, some would argue, but also practical – it is commonplace that team members know how to do their jobs better than most of their managers. Therefore teams can represent a benign revolution in the workplace – a utopia of power sharing, where everyone can participate in decision making – rather than a Darwinian, dog-eat-dog jungle of power-seeking managers desperate to control and subjugate workers (Kuipers & de Witte 2006).
- The exercise of authoritarian power by individuals may become much harder when groups act as a countervailing power, providing a structure of checks and balances via committees and executives. Even individuals within groups – such as dominant power figures – may change their behaviour if they cannot simply bulldoze the group.
- If all relevant decision makers are present in a group, then obviously it can be much easier to coordinate operations. Any clashes, overlaps or bottlenecks can be made transparent simply by the group sharing plans, and appropriate measures to forestall disaster can be put into place.
- Teams represent a form of organisational re-design – that is, they are increasingly seen in organisations that have been downsized, with numerous layers of middle management stripped out. In this new, flatter organisational design, there are fewer layers between the top and the bottom of the pyramid structure, which can mean faster communication and a reduction in middle management costs.

- Decisions and solutions of teams can be more creative than those produced by individuals if synergy takes place. The sheer stimulus of others' ideas can produce creativity in some team members, particularly if the team has deliberately undertaken brainstorming and lateral thinking exercises in structured creativity (see 'Meeting decision making and problem solving' in chapter 19).
- Risks can sometimes be managed more competently within teams. A high-risk decision for an individual can often be a moderate-risk decision for a team because risk is a function of knowledge, and team deliberations may increase knowledge about a particular situation.
- Motivation can be increased through participation (Ugboro 2006). No matter how high the quality of a decision, it has to be accepted by those who are going to implement that decision. If people have not been consulted or involved in the decision-making process, there is no mandate for change, and people may either implement the decision in an apathetic fashion or may actively work against it – they don't own it, they are not stakeholders in it, so why should they try for it? Team involvement means team commitment. Team input means team output – more input, more output; less input, less output.
- Teams are often criticised for being responsible for delays, when compared to individual processing of solutions and decisions. However, it is not often considered that delays might be a good thing. What if, for example, someone or some group decides that a problem could benefit from some benign neglect, or even better, suffer the death of a thousand subcommittees and attempts to get more data? This is not very honest, but such things do happen. This 'strength' of team decision making and problem solving can also be a weakness.

TABLE 18.6 The pros and cons of teams

Pros: teams can . . .	Cons: teams can . . .
■■ Generate many new ideas	■■ Impede decision making (not needed for routine decisions; individuals may generate more ideas)
■■ Recall information accurately	■■ Impede problem solving (not always good at solving problems which require long chains of decisions and solutions)
■■ Present multiplicity of roles (task, socio-emotional)	■■ Allow destructive role-playing to crowd out benign task/socio-emotional role-playing
■■ Present wide range of skills, contributions, experiences, and styles of decision making and problem solving	■■ Create pressures towards homogeneity of styles, roles, skills, experiences and contributions — can produce groupthink-type distortions
■■ Be ethically desirable — brings democracy to workplace	■■ Give people false expectations about workplace democracy (hierarchy inevitable?)
■■ Represent a benign revolution in the way people work together	■■ Be merely 'ideological hype' — inequality increases, not decreases
■■ Allow everyone to participate	■■ Crush individuality: not everyone is a team player
■■ Check authoritarian tyranny	■■ Create minority tyranny (dominant/authoritarian individual[s], cliques, factions, consensus holdouts — hidden agendas) ■■ Create majority tyranny — enforcement of conformity may stifle creative individuals, produce faulty decisions
■■ Make coordination easier	■■ Make coordination harder if team is dominated by competition, empire-building
■■ Speed up communication and reduce middle management costs by flattening organisation design	■■ Induce 'corporate anorexia' and 'management by stress'

(continued)

TABLE 18.6 *(continued)*

Pros: teams can . . .	Cons: teams can . . .
■■ Help induce more creative decisions and solutions — synergy	■■ Help induce conservative, lowest-common-denominator decisions
■■ Permit more competent risk management	■■ Permit more risky behaviours (risky shift, dilution of responsibility)
■■ Increase motivation through participation (quality/acceptance, mandate, input = output)	■■ Decrease motivation ■■ Allow group inertia to develop ■■ Allow accountability to decline — free riding/social loafing
■■ Bring about useful delays	■■ Often be slow and costly

Teams: the bad news

There are also many arguments against teams, including:

- Teams are not needed for routine decisions of most types: there is no need to agonise over which option to use when there is a standard operating procedure laid down and accepted by all. Also, it is by no means clear that teams are always better than individuals in generating numbers of new ideas. Some research indicates that individuals can generate more new ideas than groups or teams in certain circumstances (Ferris & Wagner 1985) and that claims of the superiority of group productivity are misguided (Nijstad, Stroebe & Lodewijkx 2006).
- Teams are not always so good at solving problems that require long chains of decisions and solutions. Therefore groups or teams are fine at playing concertos, but not composing them; or solving crossword puzzles but not writing them; or making films, but not novels.
- Ineffective teams allow destructive role-playing to become significant and even dominant.
- In ineffective teams, the homogeneity of members' outlooks is so high, it might as well be an individual; and, in fact, a broad-minded individual could easily be more effective than a narrow-minded group. Group members may conform to narrow group norms and produce groupthink-type distortions in their decisions and solutions.
- The rhetoric of 'workplace democracy' may sound good, but there may be problems with the idea. What if, for example, hierarchy and inequality are inevitable in all human affairs (Leavitt 2003)? As Jaques (1990, p. 128) observes (and see also Leavitt 2003; Overbeck, Correll & Park 2005):

> Solutions that concentrate on groups . . . fail to take into account the real nature of employment systems. People are not employed in groups. They are employed individually, and their employment contracts – real or implied – are individual. Group members may insist in moments of great esprit de corps that the group as such is the author of some particular accomplishment, but once the work is completed, the members of the group look for individual recognition and individual progression in their careers. And it is not groups but individuals whom the company will hold accountable. The only true group is the board of directors, with its corporate liability.

- Ideally, teams are the product of stable organisations, with members highly skilled and loyal to one another, but trends in the workplace (e.g. loss of job security) militate against this ideal state (Rabey 2001).
- In teams, members are expected to be 'team players', but not everyone is a team player. It is not uncommon for supervisors or team members to criticise, or even remove, other members who do not fit into the team model. Apart from the fact that teams are not always the ideal solution to all problems and situations, this is not the best way to deal with some individuals (e.g. those who may be remarkably creative and productive rather than simply wilfully deviant) (Sinclair 1992).

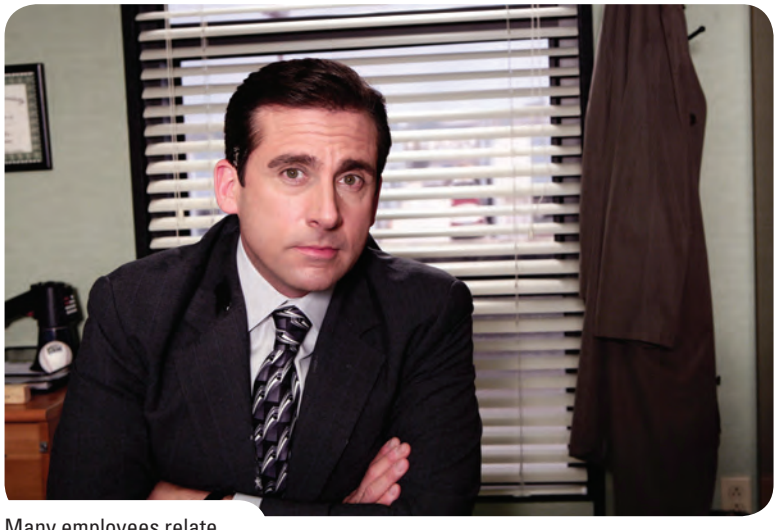
- Team members' personal needs for power, influence and playing politics may overwhelm the collective good of the team (Watt, Thomas & Hochwarter 2001). In addition to the formal agenda of the team, there may be one or several hidden agendas with which individuals or subgroups may try to manipulate others.
- Cliques, factions or teams-within-the-team may dominate the team, and may choose to paralyse and perhaps destroy the group rather than see their opponents win. Minority tyranny may occur when the team seeks consensus, and those who hold out from unanimity can block with a power of leverage way beyond what their numbers would suggest. In fact, such a minority can be a minority of one — operating, of course, as an effective majority. An individual may simply dominate the team because his or her power base is so overwhelming. This power may be based on the ability to reward and punish; on expertise, personality or charisma; or because of position within the organisation. In these circumstances, the team is there to advise and consent only or, even worse, to be a mere rubber stamp for the leader's wishes (see 'Support of individual or leader' in chapter 19).
- Teams can also tyrannise using majorities, or force of numbers, producing authoritarian pressures that conventional managers would not dare apply:

> There is often nothing inherently more 'democratic' about certain decisions because they were made by teams rather than by individual managers … The benign 'tyranny' of peers can substitute for the benign 'tyranny' of managers, with conformity pressures as strong and sanctions for deviance as impelling. In one highly participative factory, workers complained that they felt too dependent on their teams for evaluation and job security and feared being ostracised by a clique. Members of autonomous work teams in a Cummins Engine plant were likely to be harder on absent members, according to a former plant manager, than management would have dared to be; they would often appear at the doorstep to drag a person in to work if the claimed illness did not satisfy members (of course, they relied on each other's contributions more than in a conventional work situation). Indeed, management often counts on this peer pressure to stay in line as a side benefit of participation. (Kanter 1983, p. 260; see also Sinclair 1990; Fambrough & Comerford 2006)

- Such intra-group squabbling, involving minorities or majorities, can also erode one of the potentially great strengths of teams: namely the ability to coordinate complex tasks. If the team is dominated by competition and empire building, its activities will become less coordinated than would be the case if, for example, one dominant individual with total power (and average or better-than-average competence) was running the same set of operations.
- Teams are often associated with downsized organisations, and this can lead to 'corporate anorexia' (Kanter 1983; Willams 2004; Mickhail & Ostrovsky 2005). Downsizing often does more damage than good (Roach 1996), and part of that damage is that 'survivors' tend to be reassigned to overloaded job roles (Ugboro 2006). Some critics of teams in the US car industry, for example, argued that teamwork organisation produced a 'management by stress' situation where workers were asked to assume supervisory responsibilities (without necessarily more authority or pay), by removing necessary slack from the system with 'just-in-time' inventory systems and by increasing harmful peer pressure in teams by introducing group bonus plans (Parker & Slaughter 1988).
- A mediocre or disastrous team will produce low-quality, high-risk decisions and solutions. Majority tyranny, for example, can often lead to stodginess and conservatism, with teams producing lowest-common-denominator decisions and solutions. The purity and strength of any original ideas entertained by the team become diluted by endless compromises and gestures of appeasement towards powerful vested interests outside the team.

Risky shift: a tendency of groups to make decisions that are riskier than those that would have been made by any of the group's members acting individually

- Alternatively, teams sometimes produce unstable, radical decisions. Group decision making and problem solving is sometimes characterised by the **risky shift**, whereby groups make decisions that are riskier than those that would have been made by any of the group's members acting individually. Even though this is not always a bad thing, it can be bad and indeed disastrous if members of a team feel that membership entails dilution of responsibility (what belongs to everyone belongs to no-one) and hence that normal procedures of risk evaluation are not relevant.
- Following on from such behaviour is the phenomenon of team inertia, wherein team members come to rely on others to think and act for them. In such cases, an individual leader or an elite may emerge as the real force within the team, with the rest of the team acting merely a rubber stamp, and thus being effectively redundant.
- Accountability is a major problem with teams as well. How do you hold a team responsible? Sinclair (1990) suggests that teams displace responsibility, and that it is not often practical to penalise all team members equally when things go wrong. With a reduction in accountability sometimes comes an increase in social loafing or free riding behaviour among team members.
- Teams can be slow and costly. Slowness is often related to team size: if team size increases arithmetically (1, 2, 3, 4), then interactions between team members increase geometrically (1, 2, 4, 16), and for everyone to talk to everyone else in a large team is time-consuming and cash-consuming. (Avoidance or delay of action may, of course, be a deliberate strategy.)
- What if much work is simply boring, and not amenable to team restructuring? (Baldrey & Hallier 2010). What if teams are just a dream? What if people perceive 'team building' as an invasive and presumptuous attempt to create a synthetic family atmosphere where there is none? Leheney (2008) notes that many workers relate strongly to dysfunctional workplaces as depicted in the Dilbert comic strip and *The Office* television shows (UK and US versions), while Krueger and Kilham (2006) note that one quarter of the US workforce is so disengaged and disgruntled that they would actively undermine the work of other team members.



Many employees relate strongly to the dysfunctional workplace depicted in the television show *The Office*. In the US version of the show, actor Steve Carell played a fictitious boss who was notorious for undermining his employees. Research suggests many employees would undermine the work of others in a team.

- What if all the talk of teams is just 'ideological hype' (Parker & Slaughter 1988)? That is, what if the more things change in the world of teams, the more things stay the same? Inequality within an organisation might increase, not decrease, with teams. Teams are empowered to a certain extent (but not necessarily financially rewarded) while upper management may be even more empowered – and richly rewarded financially (Sennett 1998; Pruijt 2003). Teams need to be based on equality and trust, but inequality may be built into organisations. Perhaps we cannot escape hierarchies? (See Leavitt [2003] and Jacques [2002] in online chapter 9.)

Symbolism of equality is important here. According to Denton (1991), it is not to be taken lightly:

> Workplace equity and work-force trust are enhanced when perks and status symbols and, most important, true power distributions between organizational levels are reduced. Perks reward – they also distract and punish. Oriental rugs, private parking, corner offices, mahogany desks, even office sizes based on rank are destructive because they focus everyone's efforts on securing the trappings of status rather than teamwork.

George (1987) agrees, saying:

> Several obvious signs of hierarchical inequality also doom any team-building effort. Reserved parking spaces, privileged office locations and many other signs of status may reinforce the efforts of the few, but they undermine the morale of the many who are denied. Most companies that work at day-to-day team-building downplay or eliminate such unpopular signals that say that some are more equal than others.

Even more potent than symbolism is cash, salary, pay – call it what you will. Various writers have deplored the cult of the chief executive officer (CEO), leading to a situation between 1982 and 2002 in which the average US chief executive officer's pay went from 42 to 400 times that of the average US production worker. At the same time, some executives were actually paid bonuses despite performing badly.

This trend of inequality exploded in the period following the global financial crisis, when governments around the world subsidised the stability of financial institutions with massive influxes of taxpayers' money, only to see some of those who had been rescued rewarding themselves with very high bonuses within months. As US President Obama remarked, 'The American people understand that we've got a big hole that we've got to dig ourselves out of, but they don't like the idea that people are digging a bigger hole even as they're asked to fill it up' (Goldman & Runningen 2009). Such displays of inequality make team building so much harder, if not impossible, to implement.

Virtual teams

Teams or groups have traditionally operated on a face-to-face basis, but increasingly teams are virtual – that is, team members may be dispersed geographically and will thus need to communicate via technology.

Virtual team: a work group whose individual members are located in widely dispersed locations

Virtual team communication can present specific challenges, such as:

- How comfortable are team members communicating in a mediated or technology-dependent way (see Van der Klein, Schraagen & Werkhoven 2009)? Johnson, Bettinghausen and Gibbons (2009) found that team effectiveness declined when teams used virtual channels 90 per cent or more of the time.
- Are there specific problems relating to different cultures and different time zones? (Timmerman & Scott 2006; Gareis 2006)
- Does the possibility of communication breakdown motivate virtual workers to over-communicate, sending messages through more than one channel, and thus in turn exacerbating message overload? (Bélanger & Watson-Manheim 2006)
- Is the team self-managed, or will some type of leadership be necessary? (Carte, Chidambaram & Becker 2006)
- Does virtuality enrich or impoverish human communication and social interaction?

Virtuality, of course, can be a matter of degree – there may be multiple types of virtual communication (Timmerman & Scott 2006). Much communication within the one physical workplace, for example, may take place via technology such as email and voicemail.

Also, even though it may appear to be expensive in terms of travel and accommodation costs, it might be cheaper in the long run for virtual team members to meet face to face physically at least once to establish communication norms. In a study of virtual teams in a multinational organisation, researchers (Lee-Kelley, Crossman & Cannings 2004, p. 654) noted that:

> The longer but less frequent face-to-face meetings were considered important by the virtual teams when dealing with both relationship and task issues. The longer co-presence allowed the negotiation and acceptance of the team's perceived goals and outcomes. In addition, the ability

to make eye contact and to use verbal and paraverbal cues helps context setting and role or status definitions, thus enabling the team to settle down very quickly and to move on to the performing stage.

In fact, it may make sense for a virtual team's members to meet face to face at least three times during the duration of its existence:

1. At commencement: to create buy-in; establish social relationships; build trust and commitment – more than a one-hour meeting.
2. At the intermediate stage: to deal with persistent misunderstanding – usually a full workshop event, not a brief meeting.
3. At winding-up: to tie up unresolved items; generate commitment to output; recognition by celebrating success (Lee-Kelley, Crossman & Cannings 2004, p. 656).

Yauch (2007) argues that if manufacturing organisations are to cope with turbulent environments, or environments characterised by constant and unpredictable change, then they need to use teams more often in order to become 'agile' or adaptive. Such teams, he argues, need to have the attributes of being multifunctional (team members have multiple skills), dynamic (teams will be temporary, project-based structures), cooperative (teams will need to manage conflict effectively) and virtual. We need, however, to understand the negative as well as positive aspects of these attributes to ensure that such teams can operate successfully and harmoniously (summarised in table 18.7).

TABLE 18.7 Positive and negative impacts associated with agile teams

Team attribute	Multifunctional	Dynamic	Cooperative	Virtual
Positive impacts	■■ Learn new things; develop new skills ■■ Greater task identity; broader perspective ■■ Greater autonomy ■■ Better feedback ■■ Decreased repetitive motions	■■ Learn new things; develop new skills ■■ Greater task identity; broader perspective ■■ Greater autonomy ■■ Better feedback ■■ Increased organisational commitment	■■ Learn new things; develop new skills ■■ Avoid creating winners and losers ■■ Supportive work environment (positive interpersonal relationships) ■■ Promotes higher individual achievement	■■ Learn new things; develop new skills ■■ Less wasted time (increased meaningfulness) ■■ Reduced uncertainty and confusion
Negative impacts	■■ Potential for underload or overload ■■ Excessive responsibility ■■ Increased fear of failure ■■ Increased pressure ■■ Need to police others ■■ Social loafing ■■ More difficulty solving problems	■■ Excessive conflict ■■ Insufficient time to establish group norms ■■ Continually changing group dynamics ■■ Boundary management more difficult	■■ Groupthink ■■ Loss of flexibility ■■ Loss of creativity	■■ Loss of richness of interaction ■■ Loss of social contact ■■ New skill demands (IT) ■■ Difficulty in achieving cooperation ■■ Higher dependence on technology

Source: Yauch (2007, p. 24).

Communicating with others in the group/team

We have seen in this chapter that there are many advantages to working with others in groups or teams, and when things go well there, work can be a pleasant experience. We have also seen that there are many disadvantages to working in groups or teams, and when such disadvantages inflict real outcomes, then working in groups or teams can be an unpleasant experience.

Nevertheless, much of life consists of living and working with others, so it makes sense to take what we have learnt in this chapter (and other chapters) and apply it to ensure that the pleasant experiences outweigh the unpleasant ones. Here are some suggestions for doing just that:

- Become aware of the reasons why people join and leave groups (security, task complexity, social interaction, proximity and exchange). Enjoy the company of others, but be ready to assertively challenge unacceptable situations. For example, might you be staying unnecessarily with a group because your membership is based largely on proximity, coincidence, inertia and complacency?
- Be aware of the preconditions for social loafing, and strive to change things to reverse those preconditions.
- Strive for an ideal balance of task and socio-emotional role-playing behaviours in your groups and teams. Expect such a balance from others, but set an example yourself. Pay attention to not only the verbal behaviour of others but also the nonverbal behaviour.
- Act and speak to reinforce healthy formal and informal norms, and challenge unhealthy ones.
- Be on the alert for groupthink effects in groups and teams, and assertively speak out against such causes of bad decisions.
- Be aware of the stages of group/team development, and work actively to move your group/team to the performing stage.
- Be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of teams, and be ready to speak out when weaknesses surface. For example, if you feel that some viewpoints or values are not being properly considered, and someone tries to silence you by accusing you of 'not being a team player', be ready to rebut the charge and explain why.
- When communicating with team members via technology rather than face to face, be aware of the pitfalls as well as the advantages of virtual team communication.
- Learn and practise communication skills such as assertiveness, feedback, questioning, listening and reframing (see chapters 9 and 10).
- Learn and practise the verbal skills of speaking (see chapter 11).
- Learn and practise negotiation and conflict resolution skills (see chapters 13 and 14).
- Learn and practise leadership skills.
- Learn and practise meeting and group skills such as brainstorming and nominal group technique (see chapter 19).
- Learn and practise sensitivity to intercultural and gender communication styles (see chapter 15 and online chapter 7 'Gender and communication').
- Learn and practise logical, persuasive and influential skills (see chapter 12)
- If you are serious about teams working, remember they are based on trust, flatter organisations, and the perception (and reality) of not too much inequality, especially in pay and nonverbal symbolism of power and wealth (see chapter 16).

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have explored the differences between groups, social aggregates and teams. We saw that there are (at least) five reasons why people join, stay in or leave groups (security, task complexity, social interaction, proximity and exchange).

We have looked at the concepts of synergy and social loafing and examined task roles (Brainstormer, Expert, Judge, Devil's advocate, Representative, Implementer, Ringmaster and Memory), socio-emotional roles (Encourager, Peacemaker, Tension reliever and Confronter) and destructive roles (Husher, Personaliser, Recognition seeker, Victim, Blocker, Shelver, Distractor, Aggressor, Shadow and Special-interest pleader).

We have examined formal and informal norms in groups, and noted destructive norms such as groupthink and the Abilene paradox. We have considered stage and nonstage models of group development (including Tuckman's Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Adjourning model). We have considered myths surrounding teamwork, and have examined the similarities and dissimilarities of work teams and sporting teams.

We have considered the strengths of teams: they can generate many new ideas and recall information accurately; can deploy a multiplicity of task and socio-emotional roles; can make available a wide range of skills, contributions and experiences; can represent the advent of democracy in the workplace; can restrain exercise of authoritarian power by individuals; can help coordinate operations; can help speed up communication and help lower middle management costs; can provide synergy in group decisions and solutions; can help manage risk; can motivate through participation; and can help create useful delays in decision making.

We have also considered the weaknesses of teams: they are not needed for routine decisions; not necessarily more creative than individuals; not so good at solving problems that require long chains of decisions and solutions; they can act as an arena for destructive role-playing; can lead to over-conformity; can be ineffective if human inequality is inevitable; can be just 'ideological hype'; can be bad for individuals who are not team players; can allow manipulative members to prevail; can facilitate minority tyranny; can restrict coordination of work flow; can be part of 'corporate anorexia'; can dilute idea generation; can facilitate high-risk decision making; can cause team inertia; can present accountability problems; can be slow and costly; may not be wanted by workers; and may be undermined by gross inequalities in pay and rewards.

We have considered virtual teams as part of virtual organisations. We have considered under what circumstances it might be better to attempt a task individually rather than as part of a team. Finally, we considered what communication skills would help team members become more effective.

KEY TERMS

Abilene paradox *p. 596*
destructive role *p. 586*
exchange *p. 583*
formal norm *p. 592*
group *p. 582*
groupthink *p. 594*
informal norm *p. 592*
proximity *p. 583*
risky shift *p. 610*
role *p. 586*
security *p. 583*
social aggregate *p. 582*
social interaction *p. 583*
social loafing *p. 585*
socio-emotional role *p. 586*
synergy *p. 584*
task complexity *p. 583*
task role *p. 586*
virtual team *p. 611*

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What differences are there between groups and social aggregates?
2. List at least three reasons why people join, stay in or leave groups.
3. List three factors that may predispose group members to engage in social loafing.
4. List four possible approaches to preventing groupthink.
5. List at least three differences between groupthink and the Abilene paradox.
6. What are Tuckman's five phases of team development, and why is this sequence not always followed in all teams/groups?
7. Identify five advantages of teams.
8. Identify five disadvantages of teams.
9. Identify three problems associated with virtual teams.
10. Identify four different types of communication skills that we may need to deploy in group/team settings.

APPLIED ACTIVITIES

1. Consider the five-factor model for group membership (security, task complexity, social interaction, proximity and exchange). Using figure 18.3 as a model, create pie charts for at least two groups of which you are a member, showing your motivational patterns as a member.
2. Create a list of strategies and points that might be useful in controlling destructive role-players.
3. How might task and socio-emotional roles take on destructive qualities?
4. How might formal and informal norms take on destructive qualities?
5. Discuss groupthink and/or the Abilene paradox with others. Has anyone experienced one or both? What value might the approaches to them suggested in this chapter have had in those actual situations?
6. Think of another three advantages and another three disadvantages of teams.
7. Someone accuses you of 'not being a team player', which you feel is inappropriate and wrong. Devise at least one response to the charge.
8. What is the relationship of leadership to team dynamics?
9. Read chapter 19. What is the relationship between meeting procedures and group problem-solving techniques on the one hand and team dynamics on the other?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

By Monday noon Julia Stoner was feeling stressed. Even though she had hoped to direct the conversation in a meeting, she watched most of the other managers conversing with some alarm. She had wanted to generate enthusiasm, but she had not anticipated the discussion would go in this direction.

As the newly appointed human resources manager of Western Technologies Corporation (WTC), she had just completed a presentation to the Monday morning heads of department meeting on the subject of boosting productivity by changing group norms on the shop floor and in the accounts department.

The start of the presentation had been delayed while a loud and humorous discussion about Saturday's football match had taken place. The managing director, Mike Johannson, was an ex-player in the main league, and he often invited a small group of other executives over to his house to watch the match on his big LCD screen, and then brought DVDs of the same matches along, playing them before the start of the meeting, while people were drinking their first coffee of the day.

Football bored Julia, and she knew it bored at least two of the other managers present, but they certainly revealed a detailed knowledge in this morning's banter. Most of the

managers were concerned with the production of WTC's main products: microprocessor-controlled gauges and monitoring equipment. Industrial relations between management and workers had not been good for quite some time. Indeed, a number of the managers referred to parts of the shop floor as 'sheltered workshops', and the standing joke aimed at Julia was that she was the 'inhuman' resources manager.

When Julia started talking, she was aware that not everyone was concentrating. There were winks and raised eyebrows from some of her male colleagues. How childish, she thought. But after about five minutes, she noticed that Mike was looking less bored, and was beginning to take notes. Others began to do likewise.

Julia proposed that productivity levels could be raised by at least 15 per cent if she could get the go-ahead to start a team-building program, linked in with group bonuses of 1 per cent per 1.5 per cent productivity rise. Her brief, potted history of research in the area (not too much jargon, she hoped) gave evidence that it could be done.

'So we could lift our market share and/or lower prices, as well as motivate staff more. It's a win–win situation', she concluded, and sat down.

Silence. There was some uncomfortable shifting in seats, and numerous unhappy faces. Max Rinter, the marketing manager, was the first to speak, and stood up to get the attention of the team. 'That's good stuff, Julia, but … I don't know about lowering prices. Our major client is the government, and they might start asking some embarrassing questions about why we couldn't have done this years ago. We could end up with egg on our faces.' Heads nodded around the table.

'What about increasing our output, Max?' asked Claire.

'That could be tricky, too', said Max. 'The quota is pre-set, and if we try to move more, they might think we're being pushy. Inventory costs will go up if we try to stockpile in this part of the seasonal cycle.'

Jack Tuttle, the production manager, jumped in. 'That motivation stuff is interesting, Julia, but I'd need to re-jig the machines to get them working in groups. But I can see a lot of sense putting people onto piece rates to boost production.'

'What about the surplus goods, Jack?' Max said sarcastically.

'Surplus goods or surplus people?' responded Jack. 'If Julia's figures are correct, then according to the calculations I've just done, we could stay at our current level of output and get rid of 23 or 24 staff. That's about $700 000 in salaries and costs saved. Not bad, eh?'

'But … ', said Julia.

'Not bad at all', said Claire, cutting her off. 'I don't think we'll get any flak from the union. They've been pretty gutless in my last few run-ins with them. We'll sell it as a downsizing exercise – everybody's doing it – the lean, mean organisation, doing more with less; that kind of thing.'

'That's right! They'd just go to water if we present this as a fait accompli. And the shareholders should be pretty happy at the cost saving', said Max. 'Jack, how could we re-do the layout if we had that number fewer staff?'

'Well, let's see', said Jack, taking some plans from the shelf behind him and spreading them on the table. 'Now, these lads here – the volleyball crowd that's always late back from lunch – they could go, and their machines could be shifted to …'

As the conversation became more animated, Julia slumped in her chair, and wondered how things had got this far out of control.

What dynamics are at work in this group? What should Julia do?

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