What Causes Poor Group Dynamics?

Group leaders and team members can contribute to a negative group dynamic. Let's look at some of the most common problems that can occur:

- **Weak leadership**: when a team lacks a strong leader, a more dominant member of the group can often take charge. This can lead to a lack of direction, infighting, or a focus on the wrong priorities.

- **Excessive deference to authority**: this can happen when people want to be seen to agree with a leader, and therefore hold back from expressing their own opinions.

- **Blocking**: this happens when team members behave in a way that disrupts the flow of information in the group. People can adopt blocking roles such as:
  - The Aggressor: this person often disagrees with others, or is inappropriately outspoken.
  - The Negator: this group member is often critical of others' ideas.
  - The Withdrawer: this person doesn't participate in the discussion.
  - The Recognition Seeker: this group member is boastful, or dominates the session.
  - The Joker: this person introduces humor at inappropriate times.

- **Groupthink**: this happens when people place a desire for consensus above their desire to reach the right decision. This prevents people from fully exploring alternative solutions.

- **Free riding**: here, some group members take it easy, and leave their colleagues to do all the work. Free riders may work hard on their own, but limit their contributions in group situations; this is known as "social loafing."

- **Evaluation apprehension**: team members' perceptions can also create a negative group dynamic. Evaluation apprehension happens when people feel that they are being judged excessively harshly by other group members, and they hold back their opinions as a result.

**Strategies for Improving Team Dynamics**

Use these approaches to improve group dynamics:

- **As a Leader Know Your Team** – You need to guide the development of your group. So, start by learning about the phases that a group goes through as it develops. When you understand these, you'll be able to preempt problems that could arise, including issues with poor group dynamics.

- **Use Benne and Sheats' Group Roles** to identify positive and negative group roles, and to understand how they could affect the group as a whole. This will also help you plan how to deal with potential problems.

- **Tackle Problems Quickly** – If you notice that one member of your team has adopted a behavior that's affecting the group unhelpfully, act quickly to challenge it. Provide feedback that shows your team member the impact of her actions, and encourage her to reflect on how she can change her behavior.
Define Roles and Responsibilities – Teams that lack focus or direction can quickly develop poor dynamics, as people struggle to understand their role in the group.

Create a team charter – Defining the group's mission and objective, and everyone's responsibilities – as soon as you form the team. Make sure that everyone has a copy of the document, and remind people of it regularly.

Break Down Barriers – Use team–building exercises to help everyone get to know one another, particularly when new members join the group. These exercises ease new colleagues into the group gently, and also help to combat the "black sheep effect," which happens when group members turn against people they consider different. Also, explain the idea of the Johari Window to help people open up. Lead by example, share what you hope the group will achieve, along with "safe" personal information about yourself, such as valuable lessons that you've learned.

Focus on Communication – Open communication is central to good team dynamics, so make sure that everyone is communicating clearly. Include all of the forms of communication that your group uses – emails, meetings, and shared documents, for example – to avoid any ambiguity. If the status of a project changes, or if you have an announcement to make, let people know as soon as possible. That way, you can ensure that everyone has the same information.

Opinionated team members can overwhelm their quieter colleagues in meetings. Where this happens, use techniques such as Crawford's Slip Writing Method, and make sure that you develop strong facilitation skills.

Pay Attention – Watch out for the warning signs of poor group dynamics. Pay particular attention to frequent unanimous decisions, as these can be a sign of groupthink, bullying, or free riding. If there are frequent unanimous decisions in your group, consider exploring new ways to encourage people to discuss their views, or to share them anonymously.

Source: http://www.mindtools.com
# Group Dynamic Informal Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informal Leader</td>
<td>Avenue for leadership if formal leadership is weak (usually sorted out in Group formation process)</td>
<td>Provides alternative for team to coalesce around</td>
<td>Can create conflict within team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devil's Advocate</td>
<td>Takes position counter to Group</td>
<td>Can generate deeper thinking on issues</td>
<td>Can be frustrating to other group members because this person never seems to agree with the group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listener/Follower</td>
<td>Listens carefully to the thoughts and opinions of others in the group</td>
<td>Their ideas tend to be well thought out</td>
<td>They often remain quiet so the group cannot benefit from their ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstormer</td>
<td>Generates ideas constantly on a variety of subjects</td>
<td>Help move a group towards creative and meaningful solutions</td>
<td>Team may get frustrated when they are ready to move towards a decision and the idea generator is still presenting options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helper</td>
<td>Helps the team to improve its overall effectiveness</td>
<td>Aware of team dynamics.</td>
<td>Unwilling to disagree with the facilitator or other team members when they should.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifier</td>
<td>Asks questions or seeks additional information</td>
<td>Make sure assignments, roles, or decisions are clearly understood by everyone</td>
<td>May impede progress with process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediator</td>
<td>Smoothes out conflicts and maintains positive relationships</td>
<td>may be more relationship-oriented</td>
<td>May be less task-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joker</td>
<td>Breaks tension and stress</td>
<td>Keeps things light</td>
<td>May become distraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sniper</td>
<td>Provides critical analysis</td>
<td>Shoots down bad ideas</td>
<td>Shoots down good ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Maker</td>
<td>Drives the group to make decisions and act.</td>
<td>Essential component of a healthy team</td>
<td>They may not give enough time for plans to develop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Group Dynamics Four Stage Developmental Process

### Stage 1. FORMING
- Members familiarize themselves with other members.
• Engage in social comparisons, assessing one another's strengths and weaknesses.
• Try to determine if they belong in the group and, if so, in what role
• Leader should develop strategies to facilitate group member familiarity and to ease group interaction.

Stage 2. STORMING
• Characterized by resistance to the leader, resistance to control by the group, and interpersonal conflict
• Emotional resistance due to demands placed on individuals.
• Leader need to communicate openly and objectively.
• Evaluations of strengths and weaknesses as well as roles will help relieve uncertainty.
• Probably inevitable, but should be watched in the event that it undermines positive team interactions.

Stage 3. NORMING
• Conflicts are resolved. Competition is replaced with solidarity and cooperation.
• Instead of watching out for their individual well-being, the athletes work together to reach common goals.
• Roles stabilize and a respect develops for each player's unique contribution to the team.

Stage 4. PERFORMING
• Team members band together to channel their energies for team success
• Focusing on problem solving, using group process to work on tasks and test new ideas.
• Structural issues are resolved
• Roles are well defined and players help one another to succeed.
• Important that a Leader avoids activities that promote intragroup competition.
• Feedback should be given to members regarding their contributions.