

# Group culture and cohesion - and a model for better teamwork





# Group culture and cohesion

- Models such as FIRO or Susan Wheelan's 4-phases describe, among other things, how different needs and behaviors of *individuals* influence or control a group's development. The joint influence from the participants leads to the group gradually developing into different "climate phases", and can move between them in different ways.
- If you instead look at the group as a whole, almost as an "individual" in itself, there are many different kinds of groups. The group's unique identity and behavior is partly a result of the conformity exhibited by its members. Conformity is when an individual adapts his behavior and his opinions to the group's norms and leadership, so that he acts in a different way than if he were alone.
- Conformity is reinforced by various things;
  - Need for predictability and efficiency - becomes easier if everyone behaves and thinks more alike
  - Shared, important goals - (if you have different goals, the group splits, conformity decreases)
  - Solidarity members are important for a group, to cope with external and internal pressures
    - this can lead to dissenting opinions or behavior being suppressed by others in the group

# Cohesion and group thinking

- A group's norms and values are what hold the group together, a kind of 'putty' - this can also be called Cohesion. There are different types of cohesion - they are divided based on the strongest driving forces for cohesion, eg: *Care cohesion*, *Control cohesion*, *Dependence cohesion* & *Opposition cohesion*. *The more mature group is characterized by balance and synergy between different functions - synergy cohesion*)
- When groups have strong cohesion, the risk of 'negative' group thinking increases. (Based on the research of Irving Janis, 1972)
  - In addition to *strong cohesion*, the group also needs to experience a certain degree of *isolation*, be characterized by a certain kind of *leadership style* and be exposed to a high degree of *stress*. (Cohesion is, however, a prerequisite and the most important factor for maintaining groupthink)

# Cohesion and group thinking

so-called immature groups that are at risk of negative groupthink are characterized by

- The feeling of invulnerability (“We are the best”)
- Joint efforts to rationalize hazards. (“find logical reasons, ignore warnings”)
- An indisputable belief in the group's high morals ("Our opinions are the only correct ones")
- Stereotypical view of "the others".
- Strong expression of conformity (high degree of cohesion)
- Individual self-censorship of dissenting opinions (“I keep silent”)
- Shared understanding that silence means acceptance.
- Self-appointed opinion watchdogs ("We keep our eyes on each other so no one says or does anything inappropriate")

# Countering groupthink

To counteract groupthink there are the following suggestions (Irving Janis)

- Reward criticism and evaluations that come from the individual members
- As a leader, you should be restrained in presenting your own positions
- Ensure that important problems are discussed in smaller groups that work independently of each other
- Bring in 'outsiders' who can give feedback on the group's way of working
- Assign one or more members the role of 'devil's advocate' and let the members take turns to have this role. (So a person who has a critical attitude and questions most things).
- Once the decisions have been made, the group should critically go through the alternatives one more time before the decisions are implemented.

# A few different group types

groups can develop in different directions, sometimes so that they can even be considered 'sick'. We will now consider some special cases from behavioral science - mostly as examples of how things can go differently, but also to open the eyes to certain kinds of behavioral tendencies.

- Fragmented groups
- The closed group
- The dependency group
- The fight/flight group
- 'Pairbildningsgruppen' - the hopefuls
- The 'rest home' - the anxiety neurotic
- 'The tick' - the paranoid
- 'Theatre' - the hysteroid

# group type: Split groups

- Barber chair syndrome
- High workload and stress lead to few face-to-face meetings
- sms, mail, notes and agents - quick messages
- A 'spider in the web' person aka 'secretary' holds the group together, helpfully
- geographical and temporal obstacles help
- the members basically work individually - there is almost no group
- This is some people's preferred so-called group work method.

# group type: The closed group

- contrast with the divided group
- Characterized by 'we-feeling', security, belonging, emotionally active - a certain measure of calmness.
- grows under stable conditions, with low staff turnover and relatively unthreatened operations
- In order not to risk stability, a caution is developed towards both newcomers and new ideas
- Common norms and values hold the group together; the one who tries to make an excursion in the world on its own is quickly reprimanded and brought back to order - or regarded as a traitor.
- Fits well in businesses that are characterized by security, common standards and working methods.
- It costs energy to keep clouds of worry at bay and keep the group together tightly.
  - There is a risk of lack of energy and low commitment
  - Especially if the group does not receive attention 'from above', it can suffer from dejection.



## group type: The dependent group - the helpless

- dominated by a feeling of inadequacy and helplessness
- behaves as if the leader is 'all-powerful and all-knowing'
  - in relation to the leader, the members become 'small' and expect to be taken care of: The leader must support, make decisions, absorb internal strife and external threats.
- some leaders connect to the group's beliefs - others do not.
  - Does a leader succeed in combining safe care with demands for maturity and achievements  
the dependency is normalized and *the working group* takes over.
- The addiction does not have to be tied to a present boss, but can even thrive at a distance.
- If the group leader is dethroned, expectations can instead be placed on a higher manager, hired consultant or other.

# group type: The fight/flight group - the suspicious ones

- Fight or flight is the dominant activity
- The group behaves as if it is going to fight or flee - all for the survival of the group.
- The group needs an active leader, it is this one who takes the lead (for both fleeing and fencing)
- Identifies one or more common enemies - if there are none, you create them, preferably outside the group but in case of emergency within it.
- In the combat situation, the relationship with the 'enemy' is characterized by accusations, suspicion and combat measures
- In flight, instead, evasive maneuvers and a preoccupation with irrelevant things are seen
- Both modes provide the group with excuses for poor performance in terms of the *real* the work tasks.

# group type: The tick - the paranoid

- the group is outwardly suspicious and hostile
- It is usually carried forward by the conviction of owning the Truth
- The group closes itself off from the outside world to preserve its 'truth'
- Solidarity within the group is high
- internal conflicts are diverted towards external enemies; administrators, competitors, capitalists, authorities or immigrants
- People who themselves have a weak identity fall easily to the temptation of being absorbed by a paranoid group. The suggestive leader (and the group) provides security and structure.
  - They are then drawn into a struggle for or against ideas without being anchored in their *own* convictions

# Climate improvement

- Most often, but not always, it is possible to 'cure' a sick group
- Many groups work with their climate themselves, with continuous maintenance work
- Other groups need external help, often identified from various signals (complaints or increased staff turnover)

There are two main approaches:

- **Group and collaborative training**
- **Constant improvement work**



# Climate improvement

## Group and collaborative training

- aims to develop a group's capacity in terms of internal processes such as peer support, communication, conflict management, division of labor, problem solving, etc
- is often based on real experiences and staged experiences, followed by analysis and knowledge
- the participants' activity must be stimulated (role play, exercises, etc.)
- the content must be realistic
- the content should touch the core of the group's activities
- clarification of roles and goals leads to better work performance
- this is not done once and for all - but is needed repeatedly.
- If the group is facing change, for example a new manager or organization, it can be directly counterproductive to carry out the training.

# Climate improvement

## Constant improvement work

- Is a health care effort that makes room for well-functioning groups and a good work environment
- activity that takes place in everyday life
- small steps of improvement, which are often repeated, are followed up.
- Complemented by larger investments on specific working days (development days) where key issues processed;
  - What should we do?
  - What tasks need to be performed to meet goals and assignments?
  - How should we do it?
  - Within what framework do we work?
  - What can and should be improved?
- The working method gives positive results - however, it requires a committed and persistent manager who keeps it alive the activities

# Group culture - summary

- In groups, a degree of conformity occurs
- The group's norms and values constitute its Cohesion - which can be of different nature: *Care Cohesion, Control Cohesion, Dependence Cohesion & Opposition Cohesion - or Synergy Cohesion in the mature group.*
- Groupthink can occur when there is strong cohesion, as well as isolation, certain types of leadership and stress.
- Groupthink can be countered with the right measures (inviting divergent thinking, criticism, review, see alternative, etc.)
- Groups can develop in different ways, some of which develop 'sick' behaviour: (Split groups, The the closed group, the dependency group, the fight/escape group, the 'Pair formation group' - the hopeful, the 'Rest Home' - the anxiety neurotic, the 'Tick' - the paranoid, the 'Theaters' - the hysteroid)
- The group can work with climate improvement, through mainly two approaches:
  - *Group and collaborative training*
  - *Constant improvement work*