**MNO1706 Organizational Behaviour**

**Lesson 5: Groups and Teams**

**Overview**

A group/team comprises 2 or more members.

An organization also comprises 2 or more members.

Hence, a founding team of 2 members starting a new venture is an organization.

At this stage there is no difference between a team and an organization.

In OB, the requirement of having 2 members to form a group/team or an organization is due to its emphasis on interpersonal behaviour (actions and reactions).

A one-person show/business does not constitute a group/team or an organization.

When an organization grows larger, division of labour is needed to safeguard effectiveness and efficiency.

Hence, a number of groups/teams each charged with a substantially distinct set of group/team objectives may be formed to carry out and coordinate the work activities of the organization.

The differences between a group/team and an organization are apparent only after two or more groups/teams are formed within an organization.

In a car workshop, for example, there are typically groups/teams formed/reformed and assigned/reassigned to repair/maintain specific parts of a car during the course of a day.

Although groups/teams are meant to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency, conflicts may arise within groups/teams as well as between groups/teams, within as well as across organizations.

Class Reading #22a illustrates the case of conflicts between groups/teams hailing from two different firms.

Managers need to be knowledgeable about how to manage group/team processes & dynamics to prevent or minimize disruptions and maximize group/team effectiveness and efficiency.

**Definition of Group/Team in OB**

In OB, a group/team is recognized as such (e.g., as a work group/team) when there is at least a common group/team-level objective or output that binds or is pursued by the group/team members.

* As a counter example, in a typical classroom lesson where the instructor teaches and each of the students listens and learns as much as possible individually (and hopefully to get an A+ each), there is no group/team-level objective/output being pursued/produced by the class members.

Students “pursuing” the same personal objective of getting an A+ do not “share” a common group/team-level objective.

The class is therefore not considered a group/team in OB terms.

In sociological terms, the class as described above is a form of “co-acting group” because all attendees attend to the object (lesson/instructor) without attending to one another (Class Reading #22b).

All the attendees are pursuing the same personal (but not group/team-level) objective of learning something for oneself.

When there is interaction between class members and they influence each other and become concerned with one another, the class may be considered a “crowd” (an orderly or organized one, hopefully) but it is still short of being a group/team in OB terms.

* The class may become a group/team in OB terms if, for example, there is an MNO1706 OB Contest at the end of the semester and all the sectional classes will compete for an OB Knowledge Championship Trophy based on how knowledgeable they are about OB via an inter-class contest.

In this situation, the instructor of a class becomes the coach and the students in the class become the members of a participating group/team.

A group/team in OB terms is now at work where the instructor and the students of the sectional class share the same group/team-level objective of winning the trophy.

Some examples of teams in real-world organizations mentioned in Textbook Chapter 7 include:

* **Functional team** (members drawn from the same area/type of work, such as finance);
* **Cross-functional team** (members drawn from different areas/types of work, such as finance, marketing, HR, R&D, etc.);
* **Problem solving team** (a team formed to find out how to solve a problem, such as reducing wastage of a raw material);
* **Self-directed team** (a team that functions largely independently; e.g., an airline cabin crew serving customers on a flight up in the air);
* **Product development team** (a team formed to improve a product or to create a new one; e.g., improving the freshness of a frozen product; adding a spicy version of chicken to the current non-spicy one in the restaurant menu);
* **Virtual team** (members communicate through electronic channels; e.g., a project team comprising experts from various geographical areas discussing ideas via an online meeting tool); and
* **Global team** (members from different countries work as a team; e.g., executives from France, Japan, and Singapore discussing how a globally distributed product should be priced).

These examples can loosely be described as command groups because they typically have some form of reporting relationships among the group members.

Managers may sometimes allow groups that have little/no emphasis on group-level objective/output to flourish in the organization as a way to help individual employees build their own careers within the organization and enhance their sense of belonging and attachment to the organization.

These include:

* **Affinity group** (members from the same level of organizational hierarchy meet to share info, capture emerging trends, and solve problems);
* **Friendship group** (members meet to build social relationships on the personal level); and
* **Interest group** (members meet to pursue a common personal activity/interest).

**Group Versus Team**

In OB research, group and team are two terms commonly used **interchangeably** by researchers/professors for the simple reason that both comprise at least two members and members interact and mutually influence each other.

In practice, however, practicing managers typically find it worthwhile to **differentiate** between a group and a team.

* **A group (in OB terms) can be defined as a collection of 2** or more individuals interacting with & influencing each other at least minimally to pursue/deliver a group-level objective/output.

Thus, when a group of two students are tasked by an instructor to collect 20 relevant journal articles on a specific OB topic, they may simply agree to each collect 10 articles and collectively deliver the 20 articles to the instructor as the group’s output.

The group’s task is completed.

If 10 articles are short, we can trace to one of them who has failed to contribute to the group’s effort. (1 + 0 = 1; 0 + 1 = 1; 1 + 1 = 2).

* A **team** is more than a group.

A team comprises 2 more interdependent (“one cannot live without the other”) individuals who deeply share a common team goal and are mutually accountable to each other for both the team’s and their own outcomes.

Collectively they deliver more than the sum of their individual efforts (synergy). (1 + 0 = 0; 0 + 1 = 0; 1 + 1 = 3).

**Technically Required Teamwork**

Technically, some work activities require nothing less than a team.

* For example, pushing a boulder that is so heavy that a minimum of two persons are required to overcome its inertia.
* In this situation, the boulder will not move an inch if one of the two persons slackens and does not put in the effort.
* It moves (and moves quickly) when both play their roles to break the inertia and exert their efforts fully and unreservedly.

In contrast, in a group situation, like two members collating 20 articles as a group, the group task can be half-completed if one of the two members fails to deliver the 10 articles that the member has agreed to identify and select.

Other situations where a team is technically required include:

* Pushing an average-sized passenger car (e.g., 1-2 mechanics push from behind and another steers the car to the correct destination); and
* Repairing a passenger/goods lift (e.g., one lift technician presses the button on the 10th floor and the other observes how the lift reacts to the button-pressing on the basement inside the lift shaft).

Here, a team is a “must” to get the task done.

**Socially Required Teamwork**

It is not uncommon to hear a manager telling the employees: “I expect you to work closely as a team and not just as a group!”

Apparently, the manager perceives a team to be something more than a group.

Even when a group task can be done rather independently by the group members with minimum interaction and mutual influence among them (e.g., they split the group task into smaller chunks and each member does a small chunk independently), it would be desirable if the members are psychologically engaged as a team while doing the work.

* As a team, they would view each other’s role as indispensable, hold each other accountable for the team and their personal outcomes, and take pride in the team goal/output which they are trying to attain/produce.
* These positive psychological forces of a team will likely lead to a sense of solidarity among team members and result in greater productivity/satisfaction and less conflict/turnover (i.e., process gains or performance improvements are reaped from having all members working synergistically as a team and not merely additively as a group).

Hence, “teamwork” is commonly pursued by management even when a piece of work can be done by a “group”, technically speaking.

**Group Dynamics**

Because groups/teams are the basic building blocks of complex organizations that integrate and channel individuals’ efforts to attain organizational objectives, managers should understand how to maximize the effectiveness of groups/teams.

Several factors affecting group/team performance should be noted:

1. **Group Composition:** This refers to the degree of similarity or difference among group/team members.

In general, a simple task should be done by a homogenous group/team (same mind-set); a complex task should be done by a heterogeneous group/team (diverse approaches/opinions/skills).

Distrust and stereotyping may arise in a cross-cultural group/team when the members are drawn from diverse cultures.

Managers would need to create opportunities for the members to mingle so as to enhance mutual understanding and respect among them.

1. **Group Size:** Too large a group/team may result in process loss (performance decrements in a group/team process) because some members may engage in **social loafing** (put forth less effort than when working alone) and members may spend more time on social interactions and less on doing the task.

In general, it is harder to hold the individual member accountable when the group/team is larger.

1. **Group Norms:** Group norms refer to the standard against which the appropriateness of a behaviour is judged in a group/team.

Managers must ensure that the group norms at work are in line with the organizational objectives and take corrective actions if the former deviate from or compromise the latter.

For example, if an innovative culture is preferred in the organization, then at the group level individual members should not be ostracized for raising new perspectives/ideas for discussion.

1. **Group Cohesion:** This refers to the extent to which members are committed to staying together.

In general, a cohesive group/team is better than a disintegrated one.

* **But a cohesive group/team may lead to groupthink**, which happens when the members’ overriding concern is a unanimous decision rather than a critical analysis of alternatives.
* **When a group/team is disintegrated, it may be plagued by group polarization**, where members adopt more extreme & opposing positions following internal group/team interactions.

Managers must monitor group/team processes closely to identify potential groupthink and group polarization situations and intervene when needed.

Basically, managers should intervene if the group/team cannot unshackle itself from groupthink or group polarization.

1. **Informal Leadership:** In some group/team processes, an informal leader (or two) may emerge that dominate and steer the group/team’s efforts away from attaining the intended group/organizational objectives.

Managers should counsel and remove such informal leaders from the group/team if necessary.

**Group Processes**

In addition to the above, managers should be aware of the stages of group/team development life cycle:

* **Forming** (members get to know and accept each other)
* **Storming** (members define group goals and individual roles)
* **Norming** (members set off and cooperate/work to accomplish tasks)
* **Performing** (members adapt and correct along the way to reach collective objectives)
* **Disbanding/Adjourning** (members leave on a positive note in anticipation of future cooperative work)

Experienced team players who have a long history of working together may go through all the 5 stages of group/team development life cycle and get a piece of group/team work done within minutes.

For example, in Class Reading #22a as cited above, a team of 3 mechanics was tasked to remove a car that was parked illegally in front of their workshop and blocked the access to the workshop for repair work.

The team literally pushed the car away within minutes and disbanded immediately after that.

When a new group/team is formed, the manager may have a tougher job in ensuring group/team effectiveness.

* The manager may need to break the ice and help the new group/team members know/accept each other in the **forming stage**.

A lot of friendly and clear communication is needed at this stage.

* When **storming** how to get the work done, the manager may have to provide more info about the rules, regulations, and practices (“the way we get the work done here”) that constrain how the group/team work can be done in the specific context.
* In the **norming** stage (mutual understanding and full-steam ahead), the manager may have to monitor closely as the new team/group sets off to do the real work and ensure that the new members stay on course until all the members are proficient and adept at working as a group/team.
* In the **performing** stage (group/team maturing), the manager may have to provide guidance on how the new group/team members should adjust to the situational demands and changes.
* In the **disbanding/adjourning** stage, the manager may have to do a debriefing (feedback) to help all the new members learn from the group/team processes that have just concluded.

**Applications and Practical Considerations**

Several practical issues may arise when managers get things done through groups/teams.

1. ***Is it a crime to shout vulgarities at the workplace as a result of group/team conflicts?***

The workplace is considered a private premise if no members of the public are allowed in.

A supermarket is thus not a private premise during opening hours because any member of the public may walk in to make a purchase.

Regardless of whether the workplace is private or public, the behaviour of employees in or outside a group/team is governed by the Protection from Harassment Act (Class Reading #23).

Any individuals who feel that another person has caused harassment, alarm, or distress in them including through shouting vulgarities at them for work or non-work reasons, may file a complaint with the police under this Act.

The onus is on the perpetuator to prove otherwise.

Penal Code Section 294 (Class Reading #24) penalizes people who shout vulgarities near or in a public place, such as when a supermarket is open for business and the general public may walk in to make a purchase.

If a checkout cashier carries cash to the admin office accompanied by an employee escort and the two of them quarrel and one of them shouts vulgarities at another where members of the public are free to move about, then the infraction is covered by Penal Code Section 294.

1. ***It is common that some restaurants routinely ask their groups/teams of employees to go to public walkways to distribute flyers to promote their food services. Is it illegal to ask groups/teams of employees to carry out work activities in public areas and if they get injured while doing the work assigned by management, what recourses do the employees have?***

It is not illegal for managers to ask the employees to do legitimate work activities in groups/teams or individually in public areas provided that the employees do not restrain the movement of anyone who has the right of way.

Singapore Constitution Article 13 guarantees that anyone is free to move within Singapore and Penal Code Section 339 (Class Reading #24) states that no one is allowed to restrain another from their right of way in the public space.

The employees cannot block any individuals and demand that they receive the flyer before they are allowed to pass/proceed in the public space.

If the employees do this, they have committed a crime.

Managers must remind the employees of this law beforehand if they want their employees to do such work activities in public places.

In line with the liberty of doing legitimate work in public places, employees who get injured while distributing flyers at public places are covered by Work Injury Compensation Act (Class Reading #25).

Under this Act, employers are required to compensate employees for any injuries or illnesses that have arisen from working regardless of whether the work is done in groups/teams or individually.

This applies as long as the work is assigned by management and the injury is not due to self-infliction, taking part in a fight, or intoxication (taking drugs not prescribed by a medical practitioner or alcohol consumption).

1. ***You mentioned earlier in this lesson that social loafing (free riding) may arise in larger groups/teams. What should managers do about it?***

Social loafing or free riding problems may arise in large and small groups/teams.

When the slackening individuals are not held accountable, they may get away with doing less work whilst claiming full credits for the group/team tasks completed.

One way to identify the free rider is to conduct regular, anonymous peer evaluation and establish corroborative evidence to pinpoint the individual social loafer.

When two individuals work together, it is very easy for the non-free rider to notice the free rider.

In larger groups/teams, a consensus usually would emerge quickly when all members sit down to review their personal experiences in working with one another.

To encourage all group/team members to give feedback, managers would need to demonstrate that:

1. Decisive actions are taken against the free rider swiftly; and
2. They are committed to safeguarding the confidentiality of the feedback sources.
3. ***I have identified one employee who cannot work in any groups/teams effectively. What should I do about it?***

It is true that some people may not have the personality traits that suit group/teamwork.

Simply keep the lone worker in a position that does not require frequent interactions with others (e.g., store or stationery keeper).

For such individuals, their career prospects are not great because virtually all work activities in modern organizations require skilful teamwork.

1. ***If a group/team encounters a deadlock in decision making, is it wise to use voting (majority rules) to make the final choice?***

When disagreements arise, it is best to first discuss the pros/cons of all the options and convince everyone to reach a consensus.

Voting should be the last resort.

If voting is the default mode of decision making, then a lot of politicking and “favour trading” will arise outside the decision-making context - especially before a proposal is tabled for discussion.

A decision made via string pulling outside the proper discussion channel can never be the best one.

1. ***Given the importance of effective groups/teams, how should I improve teamwork among my employees?***

One approach to building team spirit is through corporate games and activities.

Class Reading #26 provides some ideas, including:

* A Shrinking Vessel
* Marshmallow Spaghetti Tower
* Egg Drop
* Stranded
* Legoman
* Escape
* Frostbite
* Minefield
* Blind Formations
* Line up Blind
* Reverse Pyramid
* Move It!
* Human Knot
* Dumbest Idea First
* What Would X Do

Managers should be always on the lookout for interesting activities that their groups/teams can try out from time to time.

This will not only build team spirit but also make work life more fun.