

Group and Team Principles and Practices

Rationale: Dunbar's number has been very influential in many areas, including architecture, management, and software development. Groups tend to break into sub-groups at predictable size intervals. Understanding these breakpoints is useful for identifying common methods of organizing groups and teams.

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Describe Dunbar's Number and how it is used.
- List the rule of thumb for common group/sub-group sizes
- Differentiate between primary and secondary groups
- Categorize the groups they belong to

{video}

You may download a copy of the visual aid used in this video: [L01-group-and-team-principles-and-practices-visual-aid.pdf](#)

Outline of the Lesson

- I. Review of previous session's content
- II. Lesson opening:
- III. Overview
 - A. Defining groups and teams
 - B. Common group sizes
 - C. Types of groups
 - D. Group membership

Body

- I. What makes people a group?
 - A. They influence one another
 - B. Members are aware of membership
 - C. Teams differ from groups in that they have a common goal
- II. Group Size
 - A. Limitations on group size
 1. Time for relationship maintenance
 - a. Primates maintain relationships with grooming, which is a one-to-one activity
 - b. Humans maintain relationships with interpersonal communication, which is 3-5x as efficient because it can be done in groups.
 2. Raw processing power
 - a. Every individual you add to a group increases the number of relationships exponentially.

- b. Keeping track of these becomes difficult quickly; you pass 1,000 relationships at only 46 people.
- c. The number of relationships can be calculated with this equation:

$$R = \frac{N(N-1)}{2}$$

B. Dunbar's Number (Dunbar, 1992)

- 1. Calculated based on correlations between primate neocortex volume and group size
- 2. Extrapolating to humans gives us Dunbar's Number
- 3. Dunbar's number is believed to lie between 100 and 250. The value 150 is commonly used.

C. Common group/sub-group sizes

- 1. Coalitions (2-5)
 - Americans report having an average of 2 confidants, down from 3 in the 1980's (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Brashears, 2006).
- 2. Parties (12-15)
- 3. Bands (Approx. 40) (Anthropologists usually place the lower limit at 20)
- 4. Clan (Approx. 150)
- 5. Tribe/Sub-Tribe (500 to 2500)
- 6. A useful rule of thumb: (1.5)-5-15-50-150-500-1500(...?)

III. What kinds of groups are there?

A. Primary (primarily exist to satisfy our need for social relationships)

- 1. Family
- 2. Friends
- 3. Social

B. Secondary (primarily exist to accomplish something)

- 1. Groups from a larger group, which help the larger group achieve needs or goals
 - a. Committees
 - b. Problem-solving groups
 - c. Decision-making groups
- 2. Groups which help their members achieve needs or goals
 - a. Study groups
 - b. Therapy groups
 - c. Neighborhood associations
 - d. Professional organizations
- 3. Groups which help others outside the group achieve a need or goal
 - a. Focus groups
 - b. Juries

IV. Group Membership

A. Voluntary association

B. Non-voluntary association

- 1. Birth
- 2. Jury duty
- 3. Class projects

Conclusion

I. Review

A. Defining groups and teams

- B. Common group sizes
- C. Types of groups
- D. Group membership
- II. Learning activity
- III. Lesson closing

References

- Dunbar, R. I. M. (1992). Neocortex size as a constraint on group size in primates. *Journal of Human Evolution*, 22(6), 469–493. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2484\(92\)90081-J](https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2484(92)90081-J)
- McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L., & Brashears, M. E. (2006). Social isolation in America: Changes in core discussion networks over two decades. *American Sociological Review*, 71(3), 353–375. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240607100301>.

Learning Activity

Complete one of these two class activity options.

In the Classroom

1. Students revisit their initial list of teams and small groups in light of the above information.
2. What categories do the groups that you listed fall into?
3. What categories had no groups? Are there groups that you are part of that match?
4. What groups are missing from your list?

Remote

1. Download this document: [L01-group-and-team-principles-and-practices-activity.docx](#)
2. Watch the activity walk-through in the lesson video
3. Classify the groups that you belong to
4. Upload the completed activity document here

Variations and Accommodations

Follow guidance from local accommodation authorities. Please contact your instructor if any accommodations are necessary.