

# Defining Groups and Teams

2020-01-16

## Course(s) Used:

- Team and Small Group Communication

## Goals and Objectives:

- Students know Dunbar's Number and how it is used.
- Students can list the rule of thumb for common group/sub-group sizes
- Students understand the difference between primary and secondary groups
- Students are able to categorize the groups they are members of

**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.

## Materials Needed

### Materials:

- None

### Technology:

- Classroom computer and projector

## Outline of the Lesson

1. Review of previous session's content
2. What makes people a group?
  1. They influence one another
  2. Members are aware of membership
  3. Group Size (Dunbar's Number)<sup>1</sup>
    1. Relationships within a group  $D = (N(N - 1))/2$
  4. Common group/sub-group sizes
    1. Coalitions (2-5)<sup>2,3</sup>
    2. Parties (12-15)

<sup>1</sup> Dunbar's number is believed to lie between 100 and 250. The value 150 is commonly used. 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).

<sup>2</sup> Americans report having an average of 2 confidants, down from 3 in the 1980's.

<sup>3</sup> 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>.

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(...?)
3. What kinds of groups are there?
1. Primary (primarily exist to satisfy our need for social relationships)
    1. Family
    2. Friends
    3. Social
  2. Secondary (primarily exist to accomplish something)
    1. Groups from a larger group, which help the larger group achieve needs or goals
      1. Committees
      2. Problem-solving groups
      3. Decision-making groups
    2. Groups which help their members achieve needs or goals
      1. Study groups
      2. Therapy groups
      3. Neighborhood associations
      4. Professional organizations
    3. Groups which help others outside the group achieve a need or goal
      1. Focus groups
      2. Juries
4. Group Membership
1. Voluntary association<sup>4</sup>
  2. Non-voluntary association
    1. Birth
    2. Jury duty
    3. Class projects
5. Hands on group work: "My Groups and Teams Revisited"
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?
6. Lesson closing

<sup>4</sup> We will get into the details of voluntary association (and dissociation) later in the semester, all of the group in this class will be Non-voluntary

*Limitations*

Requires a pre-existing list of groups/teams that the student is a member of.

*Variations and Accommodations*

Follow guidance from local accommodation authorities.