Joanne Taylor

Assignment II-Groups

Supported by theory and examples, what factors would you take into consideration when assessing the behaviour of groups in an industrial or commercial setting?

By way of definition, a group can be defined as, "two or more individuals interacting and interdependent who come together to achieve particular objectives" (Stephen.P.Robbins, 2000). Groups can be either formal or informal. Formal groups are defined by an organisation's structure, with given tasks establishing work groups. The behaviours within formal groups are likely to be stipulated by and directed towards the organisation's goals. Informal groups, on the other hand, also exist within organisations. These often develop when individuals have one or more common characteristics. Informal groups perform a very important function by satisfying members' 'psychological' needs. A theorist named Elton Mayo (1945) stressed the importance of informal groups and encouraged managers to 'grow' them.

It is important to recognise that the types of interactions among individuals within formal and informal groups deeply affect their behaviour and performance. Tuckman and Jensen's model (1977) can be of use when assessing group behaviour during its development stages within a business setting. The model suggests that groups pass naturally through five clearly defined stages, which are labelled forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning. Forming is where the set of individuals have not yet gelled. Members are keen to fix their own personal identities and make personal impressions on others. During this stage members tend to be a bit confused and uncertain about how to act in the group. Stress can be an issue to certain members due to the change to a group environment, having to form group relationships etc. The storming stage is characterized by a high degree of conflict within the group. Certain individuals come to resist the control of the group's leaders and show hostility towards each other. During the third stage, norming, close relationships develop. Members start relating to one another and dealing with failure to meet others' expectations is addressed. The performing stage is when the group, having fully developed, is ready and committed to work. Finally the adjourning stage is when the group have completed tasks and members reflect on their time together or go their separate ways.

It is important to distinguish between groups and teams within the workplace when assessing behaviour. R. Meredith Belbin (2000) ran an exercise asking participants to distinguish between the two. He noted that many features that the participants saw as typifying teams were also present, to some extent in groups. The two factors that Belbin identifies as having the most radical effect on collective behaviour are size and selection, with teams being smaller in size and needing a more crucial selection of members. Huczynski and Buchanan (2001) distinguish between the two by stating a group is, "stuck in the forming, storming, norming stage of Tuckman and Jensen's model while a team is a group that has successfully arrived at the performing stage".

One of the primary factors that can have an effect on group behaviour in a business setting is its structure. "Group structure refers to the way in which members of a group relate to one another" (Huczynski and Buchanan 2001). It is true that when people come together and interact, differences appear between individuals. Some talk while others may be good listeners. These differences between group members serve as a basis for determining behavioural differences within the group.

The differentiation of group behaviour occurs alongside several dimensions, one of those being power. A group member is likely to behave according to how much power they possess, and hence their increased ability to direct behaviour of other members. Again, conflict may arise at this stage as certain group members resent being directed by members possessing more power.

A second dimension is status, which indicates the groups 'pecking order'. Huczynski and Buchanan state "some writers argue that status is important because it motivates people and has consequences for their behaviour. This is particularly the case when individuals perceive a disparity between their own perception of themselves and how others perceive them to be". As would one expect, higher-status people within a group have more power and tend to be more influential than lower-status ones (Greenberg, 1976). Knowing this, members could take steps to enhance their status in the eyes of other group members thus getting the group to make the decisions that they want. The behaviour of lower-status group members with higher-status members can be threatening because of the distinct difference between both groups. Besides formal groups, informal groups behaviour can be affected by member's status. They may perceive higher-status members as having respect, familiarity and as being looked up to by peers within the group.

A third dimension of a group's structure is 'liking'. Within a group, individual members will either like, dislike, or be indifferent to other members. Their combined feelings towards each other represent their group's liking structure. This can be studied by using the technique of sociometry, devised by Jacob Moreno (1953). The technique involves a series of tests revealing what some members feel towards others. The liking or disliking of certain individuals by group members is likely to have a large impact on the group and may bring about negative behaviour such as hostility and conflict in certain situations.

Communication is also a major factor that can be taken into account when assessing group behaviour. The journal of 'Executive Development' states "communication must not be directed towards individuals alone, but must be carried out effectively within groups- formal and informal". These groups may work closely together, interacting freely or dispersed within a building or several buildings. When formal group members come together physically and participate in a meeting, a communication pattern analysis can be formed. The observer of the group makes notes of how often each member speaks, and to whom. The outcome is likely to discover the behaviour of members when they come together, e.g. whom members prefer or prefer not to speak to, whether the group has high-status members to whom discussion is directed towards or whether there are any barriers to communication, i.e. whether members are sat unable to communicate to those further down the table due to the large size of the group. 'The International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management states that group size has had an affect on US Retail hardware cooperatives. A 1997 merger doubled the membership of one group and generally had a negative impact upon the group dynamics. However, their research shows that the size of the group did not influence communication frequency but affected each member's level of identification within the group, e.g. The higher the identification of members, the more effective the communication.

One of the primary structural elements of groups is the fact that members tend to play specific roles in group interaction. A role can be defined as "the typical behaviours that characterize a person in a social context" (R.Baron and J.Greenberg 1990). An understanding of roles can help to determine why group members will show a consistent preference for certain behaviours and not for others. As a group

deals with its problems, individuals begin to behave in certain ways taking on different roles within the group. Some may contribute to the welfare and progress; others may add little or nothing to its success. Meredith Belbin developed a useful framework for understanding roles within a group or team. He produced a self-report questionnaire and distinguished nine team roles which people with certain characteristics will 'fit', limiting the likelihood that they will be successful in other roles. Belbin's team-role theory is extensively used as a counselling and team development tool by organisations and management consultancies in the UK as stated in 'The Journal of Management Development'. The study tested Belbin's proposal that teams in which a wide range of team-roles are represented perform better than those when there is an imbalance of roles as certain roles are over-presented. Results showed that a 'mixed' group consisting of one co-ordinator, one plant, a completer finisher and a team worker performed better than teams consisting of shapers alone.

On the other hand, Belbin's team-role theory is not without its critics. 'The Journal of Management development' states that "most teams have no set roles and that every member often takes the roles of others".

Conflict is also an issue that needs to be considered as it can have dramatic effects on group behaviour. Due to the different roles that members play within groups, conflict can arise under certain conditions and can cause frustration and added pressure upon certain members. Conflict can be positive as constructive disagreements between members can lead to better group outcomes. However, conflict can also be destructive and dysfunctional.

Group norms are "acceptable standards of behaviour within a group that are shared by the group's members" (Stephen.P.Robbins, 2001). Each group will establish its own set of norms. For example, group norms may determine who to communicate with, how hard to work etc. When agreed to and accepted by the group, norms act as a means of influencing the behaviour of group members, thus need to be taken into account when finding out why groups behave in a certain way.

Today, groups make many of the decisions in organisations. An advantage to this is a greater amount of information and experience can be gathered than an individual alone can gather. However there are many disadvantages. Working in groups may lead to certain members thinking they can 'free ride' and not contribute to decisions. Traits such as shyness can affect certain people from offering opinions, as can loud, dominant people, leading to a lack of group action. One of the major problems facing organisations today is 'groupthink', a process discovered by Irving Lester Janis (1941). This is when group members develop a strong spirit and become so concerned with not disrupting the like-mindedness of the group, they are reluctant to challenge the group's decisions. This process that occurs can be damaging to organisations. The 'International Journal of Corporate Communications' states two cases of possible groupthink at British Airways and Marks & Spencer "causing blocked management communications and leading to the fall in reputation and stock market valuation of these two companies".

In conclusion, all of the above factors are what I would consider when assessing the behaviour of groups within a commercial or industrial setting. Managers should note that groups existing within their organisation, whether formal or informal, can be utilised at all levels, despite downfalls that can occur such as conflict, stress etc. However, it is the consideration of these behaviour changing elements and the balancing of the positive and negative factors that can produce a great team in the long run, thus enabling them to be more productive within the work place.

List of References

A.Huczynski and D.Buchanan, 2001, Organisational Behaviour An Introductory Text, 4th Ed, UK, Prentice Hall

R A Baron and J Greenberg, 1990, Behaviour in Organisations: Understanding and Managing the human side of work, 3rd Ed, USA

S P Robbins, 2000, Essentials of Organisational Behaviour, 6th Ed, UK, Prentice Hall

Jack Eaton, 'Management Communication: the threat of groupthink', *Corporate Communications: An international Journal,* 6 (2001)

Jane S Prichard; Neville A Stanton, 'Testing Belbin's team role theory of effective groups', *The Journal of Management Development,* 18 (1999)

Leslie Stoel, 'Retail cooperatives: group size, group identification, communication frequency and relationship effectiveness', *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management,* 30 (2002)

Mitch McCrimmon, 'Teams without roles: empowering teams for greater creativity', *The Journal of Management Development,* 14 (1995)

Nelda Spinks; Barron Wells, 'Communicating with groups: prompt, purposeful, productive team meetings', *Executive Development,* 8 (1995)

<u>Bibliography</u>

www.emeraldinsight.co.uk

R.M.Belbin, 1996, <u>The coming shape of Organisation</u>, UK, Butterworth.Heinmann

Joanne Taylor

Appendices