Cohesion and Climate in the Small Group

Chapter 12

The Importance of Cohesion

Definition

Cohesion is when a member reaches an acceptable level of desire to stay in the group and is a behavior that can change over the course of a group’s existence.

Two types of cohesion

Task cohesion refers to the degree to which group members work toward a common goal.

Social cohesion reflects the level of positive affect among group members.
The Importance of Cohesion

Benefits of social cohesion

1. When a group member feels successful, she contributes to the group’s task accomplishment

2. When a group member feels connected, he communicates with his group members and participates in group interaction

3. When a group member feels valued, she appreciates her group members

4. When a group member feels supported, he expresses caring, empathy, and concern about his group members

The Importance of Climate

Definition

Communication climate is the relative acceptance or rejection a group member feels based on the social and psychological tone of the relationships established among group members
The Importance of Climate

Two types of climate

1. In a **supportive communication climate**, group members feel their contributions are welcomed and valued.

2. In a **defensive communication climate**, group members feel their contributions are neither welcomed nor valued.

How Communication Climate is Established

For a group to establish a **supportive communication climate**, group members essentially must maximize their use of the six dimensions that promote a supportive communication climate and minimize their use of the six dimensions that promote a defensive communication climate.
Six Dimensions of Communication Climate

1. Description and evaluation focus on how group members take ownership of their verbal and nonverbal expressions

Supportive: Description describes her feelings and presents her viewpoints as her own

Defensive: Evaluation passes judgment, assigns blame, and interrogates group members

Six Dimensions of Communication Climate

2. Problem orientation and control deal with how group members approach task accomplishment

Supportive: Problem orientation focuses on collaborating with group members by seeking a mutually defined and acceptable solution

Defensive: Control imposes a point of view on group members

Six Dimensions of Communication Climate

3. Spontaneity and strategy center on the degree of openness that exists among group members

Supportive: Spontaneity openly expresses thoughts, feelings, or emotions upfront

Defensive: Strategy shares thoughts, feelings, or emotions less than honestly
Six Dimensions of Communication Climate

4. Empathy and neutrality focus on how group members demonstrate concern or indifference toward one another

Supportive: Empathy identifies with the group members and attempts to understand their feelings, needs, and interests

Defensive: Neutrality indicates an indifference toward the other group members and their feelings, needs, and interests

Six Dimensions of Communication Climate

5. Equality and superiority deal with how group members minimize or maximize their individual differences

Supportive: Equality treats all group members the same and believes the contributions of all group members are equal

Defensive: Superiority treats all group members differently because members are not considered as equals

Six Dimensions of Communication Climate

6. Provisionalism and certainty center on group members' degree of inflexibility or rigidity when communicating with each other

Supportive: Provisionalism makes tentative judgments about the task and the group members

Defensive: Certainty sees only one way to approach a task.
Turning a Defensive Climate into a Supportive Climate

Four guidelines

1. Monitor relational communication by reviewing the negative messages associated with each dimension of a defensive communication climate and actively working toward replacing the negative message with a positive message.

2. Use confirming messages and avoid the use of disconfirming messages.
   - A confirming message recognizes the value and importance of a relational partner.
   - A disconfirming message makes a relational partner feel devalued.
Turning a Defensive Climate into a Supportive Climate

Seven disconfirming messages

1. An impersonal message is nonimmediate and cliché-ridden
2. An impervious message is not acknowledged by the receiver
3. An incoherent message is difficult to follow

3. Reduce the use of discounting messages, which disparage or fail to affirm a new idea that emerges in either a verbal or nonverbal form
4. Engage in feedback.

A Final Note

The social-emotional aspect of group members’ communication becomes more important as the group matures and works together

Cohesion occurs over the life span of a group, which means that at any given time, cohesion will affect how group members communicate with each other