Development of Small Group Roles

Chapter 8

Functional Approach

Definition

Focuses on the communicative behaviors used by group members during group meetings

Small Group Roles

Two things to consider when defining the word role

1. Communicative statements group members make sends messages about who they are and what function in the group they serve

2. Group members assign roles to each other
Small Group Roles

Definition of role

A role is a repeatable pattern of communicative behaviors that group members come to expect from each other.

General Propositions of Roles

Roles are learned behaviors.
Role behavior is affected by self-concept.
Group members play multiple roles simultaneously.
General Propositions of Roles

As a result of playing multiple roles simultaneously

1. **Role rigidity** occurs when group members limit themselves by assuming only one or two roles.

2. **Role conflict** occurs when two or more members vie for the same role.

3. **Role strain** occurs when members are required to assume a new role and they are reluctant to do so.

Role Development

A member can learn to play a role in two ways

1. The first way is to engage in information seeking.

2. The second way is through feedback, which is the response a listener gives to a speaker about the speaker’s behavior.

(Both apply across the lifespan)
Role Development

Types of feedback

Positive feedback reinforces the idea that the behavior should continue.

Negative feedback helps group members identify weaknesses and make improvements.

Ambiguous feedback offers little information to the group member.

Three Classifications of Roles

Formal, Informal, & Deviant

Formal Roles

Definition

Specific role positions assigned to one group member through appointment or election as part of the group’s structure.

Formal roles are the leader, recorder, and critical advisor.
Formal Roles

The leader is responsible for moving the group towards its goals and convincing external audiences the group is achieving or has achieved its goals.

Formal Roles

The recorder takes the minutes of meetings and records any other actions of the group that need to be stored as permanent records.

Formal Roles

The critical advisor challenges group members' ideas in a constructive manner.
Informal Roles

Definition

Emerge through group member interaction

Any group member who has the appropriate communicative and group skills often communicates in such a manner to fulfill the role function.

Informal Roles

Five informal roles

Task leader
Social-emotional leader
Information provider
Central negative
Tension releaser

Informal Roles

Task leader

Is a take charge type of group member who assumes the responsibility of making sure the group’s discussion moves along on the task.
Informal Roles

Social-emotional leader
Is concerned with the building and maintenance of group member relationships

Informal Roles

Information provider
Exercises the ability to synthesize information and contributes information in the form of facts, statistics, examples, and quotations

Informal Roles

Central negative
Challenges the group's decisions
Informal Roles

Tension releaser
Uses humor strategically to ease tensions in the group that may arise over role conflicts, personality clashes, or problems with the decision-making process associated with the task.

Deviant Roles

Definition
Destroy the group’s productivity and success because the communicative focus centers on an individual member rather than on the best thing for the group.

Deviant Roles

Ten deviant roles

1. The airhead purposely acts stupid so other members will complete the task.

2. The aggressor attacks other members or the task.

3. The blocker interferes with the group process by disagreeing frequently.
Deviant Roles

1. The clown makes a fool of herself by acting dumb or saying stupid things

2. The dominator monopolizes group time and tries to show superiority

3. The egghead acts as if he is smarter than other members

4. The recognition seeker seeks attention by boasting

5. The self-confessor expresses personal feelings unrelated to group's goal

6. The special pleader introduces irrelevant information and supports it

7. The whiner complains about having to participate in the group task

A Final Note

To play the role which is appropriate in a group, it is important to remain flexible.

Role flexibility refers to possessing the skills and abilities needed to engage in a variety of group member roles.
A Final Note

Three ways to maximize role flexibility

1. Resist role rigidity
2. Place group goals above personal goals
3. Identify ways to contribute to playing group task roles and group building and maintenance roles

A Final Note

Task roles

The elaborator
The energizer
The information giver
The information seeker
The initiator
The opinion giver
The opinion seeker
The orientor

A Final Note

Building and maintenance roles

The compromiser
The encourager
The follower
The harmonizer
The interpreter