

# Apply Principles of Group Dynamics

## Introduction

Have you observed how people behave and communicate with each other while working in a group? You will always find persons who communicate a lot and others who are reluctant to say something. You, as a leader, or as an instructor should be aware of the different types of human behaviour and know how to deal with them. This Skill Card gives an overview of common observed behaviours of individuals in a

## Positive Roles

- Encourager:** supports and accepts the contributions of others
- Harmonizer:** resolves differences between individuals
- Compromiser:** offers to change his/her ideas for the sake of the group
- Gatekeeper:** makes sure that all members have a chance to talk, encourages reluctant members and stops dominant participants

These are roles that every group needs to perform well. If they do not exist, it is the leader's duty either to do them or appoint someone else to fulfill the roles.

group and suggests how you can influence or guide an individual within a group.

## Negative Roles

Problem	Description	What the leader should do:
Group or individuals floundering	Group members suffer through false starts and directionless discussions and activities, group members can also resist moving from one phase or step to the next.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare an agenda</li> <li>• formulate objectives</li> <li>• give a time frame</li> <li>• distribute a written assignment</li> </ul>
One or more participants controlling and influence the group "The Boss"	Some members have a disproportionate amount of influence in a group. These people usually have a position of authority or an area of expertise on which they base their authority. Teams need authorities and experts because these are important resources. Most teams benefit from their participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reinforce the agreement that no area is sacred</li> <li>• make clear that it is important for the group to make its own way for all members to understand the process and operation, the expert may occasionally be asked to instruct the group and to share knowledge</li> </ul>
One or more participants dominate the discussion or the activity "Dominator"	Dominating group members talk too much. Instead of concise statements, they tell long stories and dominate the group discussion and rarely give others a chance to contribute. Basically they like to hear themselves talk. Normal moments of silence that occasionally occur are an invitation for the dominator to talk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have group members write down their thoughts and share them</li> <li>• a statement like: "We have heard from you this. What have the others to say?"</li> <li>• take "balance of participation" as an issue to discuss</li> <li>• when presenting a question, avoid having eye contact with the dominator</li> </ul>
Shy or reluctant participants "Listener"	Many groups have one or two members who rarely speak. They are the opposites of the dominators. When invited to speak, these members commonly say "I am participating; I listen to everything that's said. When I have something to say, I'll say it". There is nothing right or wrong about being extroverted or introverted, these are just differences between people.  Reluctant participants feel shy or unsure of themselves in the group. They must be encouraged to contribute.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• structure participation the same way as for dominating participants</li> <li>• give also individual assignments</li> <li>• act as a gatekeeper: "Does anyone else have ideas about this?" (have eye contact with the reluctant participant); or more directly, "Raju, what is your experience in this area?"</li> <li>• address a question in an area where the reluctant individual can give an answer</li> </ul>
A person who wants to argue	Usually such a person irritates the group and unfavorable opinions will be expressed followed by a silence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the silent situation to address a question to another member.</li> </ul>

A person talks with neighbours <b>“Talker”</b>	This problem is more likely to occur in a larger group. It may be the result of a talkative person’s need to speak when unable to address the group as a whole. Side conversations become a problem only if they last for a long time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• invite the individual to share with everyone what is being said</li> <li>• be quiet and look at the talking person</li> </ul>
A person explains personal opinions as unquestioned facts	Some group members express their personal beliefs and assumptions with such confidence that listeners assume they are hearing a presentation of facts. Most group members are reluctant to question self-assured statements from other members.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Is what you said an opinion or a fact? Do you have data?”</li> <li>• “How do you know that this is true?”</li> </ul>
A group member wants to complete the task in a hurry	Many groups will have at least one “do something” member who is either impatient or sensitive to pressure from time. This type of person typically reaches an individual decision about a problem and its solution before the group has had time to consider different options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• remind team members that the result must be well motivated</li> <li>• confront the rusher using techniques of constructive (developmental) feedback</li> </ul>
One or more group members attacks one participant <b>“Aggressor”</b>	Discounts happen for many reasons. Perhaps the discounted member said something irrelevant to the team’s discussion, or did not clearly state the idea. Perhaps the rest of the team missed the meaning in the statements. No matter what the reason, every member deserves the respect and attention from the team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• support the discounted person</li> <li>• interrupt anyone who frequently discounts or ignores previous speaker’s statements, use guidelines for constructive feedback</li> </ul>
The discussion is not focusing on the topic	There is a natural tendency to move away from the subject. Sometimes these do not happen consciously. They can also happen when the group wants to avoid a subject that needs to be addressed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use a written agenda with time estimates for each item</li> <li>• write topics or items on a flipchart and post the pages on the wall</li> <li>• direct the conversation back on track</li> </ul>
Some team members create conflict <b>“Trouble makers”</b>	Sometimes a group becomes a field of combat for members who are competing each other. Usually, the issue is not the subject they are arguing about but rather the contest itself. Other members feel like spectators at a sports match.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when confrontations occur during a group activity, ask the adversaries not to discuss the issue within the group.</li> <li>• push them to some contract about their behaviour or ground rules for managing their differences without disrupting the group</li> </ul>

### Other negative roles

**Blocker:** opposes any decision without giving alternatives  
**Self confessor:** talks about personal problems not related to the group task  
**Playboy:** shows lack of interest, distracts others  
**Follower:** willing to accept the group decision, is more a listener than an active participant  
**Help seeker:** tries to gain the sympathy of the group, criticizes himself and pretends not to be able to do a task  
**Special-interest pleader:** does not give his/her own opinion, speaks for others to control the group

### Conclusion

One way to deal with group problems, particularly those arising from unspoken issues, is to talk about them. Most problems require a more structured solution.

We have offered an overview of common problems that might arise when people work together. Use the tips how to deal with different situations to make your groups work more effective and with cooperation.