

# Role Functions of a Group

**Purpose:** To examine the roles people play in a group, and how behaviors affect group dynamics.

**Competencies:**

- Communication
- Leadership and Groups

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** Slips of paper that brief participants on their role

Handout-Role Functions of a Group

**How To:**

- Hand out observer sheets to all participants.
- Go over the different group role descriptions.
- Have one team (or half the team) role play while the other team (half a team) observes. Then switch.
- The role playing team should sit in a circle in the front of the room.

The scenario is: You have been such a great group that you are getting sent on a free vacation anywhere in the US. The only catch is they have to come to consensus about where they all want to go in ten minutes.

- Give each member a role description slip that explains what role they should play in the group discussion.
- Ask the observers to try to guess which members are playing which roles. Make notes in the guess column on their observer sheet. Be sure to observe the group's interactions and the productivity of the group.
- Give participants 10 minutes to role play.

**Wrap Up:** (10 minutes)

- Ask the observers to share what they saw.
- Ask the students who were assigned as the productive roles how they felt during the role playing experience.
- Was the group productive? Why or why not?
- What are some ways to deal with difficult members?

# Role Functions of a Group

The members of an efficient and productive group must provide for meeting two kinds of needs: what it takes to do the job (or *task roles*), and what it takes to strengthen and maintain the group (*group-building roles*). What members do to serve group needs may be called *functional roles*. Statements and behaviors which tend to make the group inefficient or weak may be called *nonfunctional behaviors*.

## Task Roles

**Initiator** – proposes solutions; suggests new ideas, new definitions of the problem, new attack on the problem, or new organization of the material.

**Information Seeker** – aware that group needs more facts or data before proceeding; asks for clarification of suggestions; requests additional information or facts.

**Opinion Seeker** – aware that group needs more insight, ideas or opinions before proceeding; looks for an expression of feeling about something from the members; seeks clarification of values, suggestions or ideas.

**Information Giver** – Offers facts or generalizations; relates one's own experience to the group problem in order to illustrate points.

**Opinion Giver** – States an opinion or belief concerning a suggestion or one of several suggestions, particularly concerning its value rather than its factual basis.

**Clarifier** – elaborates or explains ideas in new words to add new meaning; shows how something might work if adopted; clarifies; gives examples or develops meanings.

**Summarizer** – condenses the nature of “the opinion” or discussion in a capsule format for clarity; pulls together related ideas or suggestions; restates suggestions after the group has discussed them.

**Facilitator** – gives direction to the group by planning how to go on with the group work and by calling attention to the tasks that need to be done; assigns tasks to different members.

**Evaluator** – compares group decisions or accomplishments with group standards; measures accomplishments against goals.

**Consensus Tester** – tentatively asks for group opinions in order to find out whether the group is nearing consensus on a decision.

# Role Functions of a Group

## Group-Building and Maintenance Roles

**Encourager** – welcomes all individuals and diverse ideas; acts friendly, warm, responsively to others; praises others and their ideas; agrees with and accepts contributions of others.

**Gatekeeper** – invites those who have not yet spoken or who have been trying to say something into the conversation; suggests limited talking time for everyone so that all will have a chance to be heard.

**Follower** – an active listener who willingly supports the group's actions and decisions; thoughtfully accepts ideas of others; serves as audience during group discussion.

**Mediator** – harmonizes conflict and seeks to straighten out opposing points of view in a clear way; makes sure group members understand each other.

**Tension Reliever** – drains off negative feeling by jesting; puts a tense situation in wider context.

## Nonfunctional Behaviors

**Aggressor** – works for status by criticizing or blaming others; shows hostility against the group or some individual; deflates the ego or status of others.

**Blocker** – interferes with the progress of the group by going off on a tangent; cites personal experiences unrelated to the problem; argues too much on a point; rejects ideas without consideration.

**Competitor** – vies with others to produce the best idea; talks the most; plays the most roles; gains favor with the leader.

**Clown** – horses around; clowns; jokes; mimics; disrupts the work of the group.

**Withdrawn** – acts indifferent or passive; resorts to excessive formality; daydreams; doodles; whispers to others; wanders from the subject.

In using a classification such as the one above, people need to guard against the tendency to blame any person who falls into a “nonfunctional behavior.” It is more useful to regard such behavior as a symptom that all is not well with the group's ability to satisfy individual needs through group centered activity. Also be aware that each individual is likely to interpret such behaviors differently. What appears to be a nonfunctional behavior may not be necessarily so, for the content and the group conditions must also be taken into account. There are times when some forms of being aggressive contribute positively by clearing the air and instilling energy into the group. Your group will function more effectively if the members become conscious of these roles and can apply them to group situations when they are needed.

## Role Functions of a Group

- 1) You are the **Initiator**, act this out by proposing solutions; suggesting new ideas, new definitions of the problem, new attack on the problem, or new organization of the material.
- 2) You are also against New York City.

- 1) You are the **Information Seeker**, act this out by asking for clarification of suggestions; requesting additional information or facts.
- 2) You are also against Vermont.

- 1) You are the **Opinion Seeker**, act this out by trying to get the group's insight, ideas or opinions before making a decision; look for an expression of feeling from the members; seek clarification of values, suggestions or ideas.
- 2) You are also against Cape Cod.

- 1) You are the **Information Giver**, act this out by offering facts or generalizations; relate your own experience to the group problem in order to illustrate points.
- 2) You are also against San Francisco.

- 1) You are the **Opinion Giver**, act this out by stating an opinion or belief concerning a suggestion or one of several suggestions, particularly concerning its value rather than its factual basis.
- 2) You are also for Portland, Maine.

- 1) You are the **Clarifier**, act this out by elaborating or explaining ideas in new words to add new meaning; show how something might work if adopted; clarify ideas; give examples or develop meanings.
- 2) You are also for Orlando.

## Role Functions of a Group

- 1) You are the **Summarizer**, act this out by condensing the nature of “the opinion” or discussion in a capsule format for clarity; pull together related ideas or suggestions; restate suggestions after the group has discussed them.
  - 2) You are also against Portland, Maine.
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- 1) You are the **Facilitator**, act this out by giving direction to the group by planning how to go on with the group work and by calling attention to the tasks that need to be done; assign tasks to different members.
  - 2) You are also for San Francisco.
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- 1) You are the **Evaluator**, act this out by comparing group decisions or accomplishments with group standards; measure accomplishments against goals.
  - 2) You are also for New York City.
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- 1) You are the **Consensus Tester**, act this out by tentatively asking for group opinions in order to find out whether the group is nearing consensus on a decision.
  - 2) You are also against Orlando.
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- 1) You are the **Encourager**, act this out by praising others and their ideas; agree with and accept the contributions of others; welcome all individuals and diverse ideas; act friendly, warm, responsively to others.
  - 2) You are also for Vermont.
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- 1) You are the **Gatekeeper**, act this out by inviting those who have not yet spoken or who have been trying to say something into the conversation; suggest limited talking time for everyone so that all will have a chance to be heard.
  - 2) You are also for Portland, Maine.

# Role Functions of a Group

1) You are the **Follower**, act this out by being an active listener who willingly supports the group's actions and decisions; thoughtfully accept ideas of others; serve as audience during group discussion.

2) You are also for San Francisco.

1) You are the **Mediator**, act this out by harmonizing conflicts and seek to straighten out opposing points of view in a clear way; make sure group members understand each other.

2) You are also against Vermont.

1) You are the **Tension Reliever**, act this out by draining off negative feeling by jesting; put a tense situation in wider context.

2) You are also for Orlando.

1) You are the **Aggressor**, act this out by working for status by criticizing or blaming others; show hostility against the group or some individual; deflate the ego or status of others.

2) You are also for New York City.

1) You are the **Blocker**, act this out by interfering with the progress of the group by going off on a tangent; cite personal experiences unrelated to the problem; argue too much on a point; reject ideas without consideration.

2) You are against Orlando.

1) You are the **Competitor**, act this out by vying with others to produce the best idea; talk the most; play the most roles; gain favor with the leader.

2) You are also for Cape Cod.

## Role Functions of a Group

- 1) You are the **Clown**, act this out by horsing around, clowning, joking, mimicking; disrupt the work of the group.
- 2) You are also against Portland, Maine.

- 1) You are **Withdrawn**, act this out by being indifferent or passive; resort to excessive formality; daydream; doodle; whispers to other; wander from the subject.
- 2) You are also against Aspen, Colorado.

# Role Functions of a Group

## **Role Functions – Observer Sheet**

### **ACTION**

### **GUESS**

### **ACTUAL**

Initiator

Information Seeker

Opinion Seeker

Information Giver

Opinion Giver

Clarifier

Summarizer

Facilitator

Evaluator

Consensus Taker

Encourager

Gatekeeper

Follower

Mediator

Tension Reliever

Aggressor

Blocker

Competitor

Clown

Withdrawn