

WORK GROUP DYNAMICS AND DIVERSITY



STUDY UNIT 3

Group and Organisational Psychodynamics

Key Concepts

- The Sophisticated Assumption Work Group:
 - These two modes of behaviour are omnipresent – always present at the same time in all human systems.
 - Sophisticated work functioning refers to the system's rational behaviour whilst working consciously on its primary task, structuring the system in terms of strategy, goals, structures and operations towards success.
 - If a system only functioned in a sophisticated manner, all individuals, groups and organisations would have been successful in all its endeavours.

Key Concepts

- The Basic Assumption Work Group:
 - The basic assumption work functioning refers to the system's irrational behaviour operating below the surface of consciousness which may lead to off-task and/or anti-task activities and its associated high levels of anxiety and conflict.
 - The basic assumption behaviour represents the unknown in the system and describes how work performance is influenced by unknown and unconscious behaviours, leading to all kinds of work, performance and relationship conflicts and problems.

Assumptions of Group functioning

- Dependence:

- The assumption is that a group is dependent on its leader
- Employees unconsciously experience dependence on a parental figure
- The need may be for protection, care, love, acceptance or learning in a similar way that employees remember their parents or other authority figures.
- This may manifest in employees acting like children
- In reality, management is not the employees' parents and will not take up the parent role.
- Because their needs are not met, employees experience frustration, helplessness, and powerlessness.
- This may manifest in employees moaning about managers not caring or being hostile towards them.

Assumptions of Group functioning

- **Fight/Flight:**
 - The assumption is that a group uses fight and/or flight responses towards an “enemy” and the leader’s role is to mobilise the fight of flight responses so as to preserve the group.
 - Fight responses manifest in aggression against the other, such as colleagues, group members and management.
 - Examples are where employees act towards the other by being jealous or envious, ignoring them, being sarcastic, verbally attacking, bullying or harassing them, boycotting etc..
 - Flight responses manifest where employees physically and/or emotionally detach or dissociate themselves from the other.
 - Examples are where employees become physically ill, resign or psychologically avoid contact with the other

Assumptions of Group functioning

- Pairing:

- The assumption is that a group uses pairing (a special connection) between two members (ideas) to generate the new “saving” idea.
- Employees unconsciously experience a fear of loneliness, separation and alienation, which leads to a wish for connection, creativity and the fantasy that the solution lays in the pairing of differences or opposites (people or ideas).
- For example, in diversity workshops facilitators often get obsessed with trying to force connections between black and white people
- Thus, pairing of some parts may seem like ganging up against the perceived aggressor or authority figure which may even lead to intra-group and inter-group conflict.

Social Defences

- Social Defences:

- It develops in the organisation where employees - as a collective unconscious system - agree on their views on an object.
- The group as a whole consciously and unconsciously experiences a particular anxiety, for example in how to deal with threat such as pain, death or germs (as in a hospital), or the leader's hostility towards group members.
- One powerful group member may articulate (known as externalisation) a way or process that seems attractive to everyone as a good way to reduce the group's anxiety.
- This may be some direct conscious modus operandi (for example a mechanical solution) or an indirect and unconscious way to relieve the anxiety but not necessarily the core of the problem.

Social Defences

- Social Defences:

- An example is where a hospital accepts a new and more professional dress code as an indirect way of coping with the pain of working with sick and dying patients.
- Thus the behaviour becomes institutionalised in that system.
- It is therefore an operationalisation of the psychic defense as a result of a conscious compromise that is based on unconscious ideation.
- In other words, a social defence is constructed unconsciously by a collective of employees who shares the same work-related anxiety, externalizing it by collectively accepting an operation and unconscious agreement to operationalise a specific defence mechanism.
- As such, social defences are necessary and serve to facilitate an easier and more tolerable working environment.

System Domain Defences

- System Domain Defences:
 - System domain defences manifest in larger cohesive systems such as a profession.
 - For example: human resources management, psychology, nursing, auditing, or an industry (e.g. finance, manufacturing).
 - For example, consider the way auditors are well known for working 12-14-hour days and how most auditors accept this as the norm; how psychologists are feared as people who "can look through you"; how doctors are seen as clever and important.
 - These can be seen as projections onto the profession which the members of the profession identify with and which then become part of their behavioural repertoire through the group's projective identification.

CIBART CONSTRUCTS

- **CONFLICT:**

- Conflict is seen as the driving force of group behaviour and performance
- Conflict refers to the split between differences
- It can manifest intra-personally, interpersonally, intragroup and intergroup

- **IDENTITY:**

- Is the fingerprint of the group
- It refers to characteristics that make the group unique
- Identity is influenced by the personality of the leader and the group's experience of leadership

CIBART CONSTRUCTS

- **BOUNDARIES:**
 - Boundaries can be seen as a safety blanket of the group
 - It refers to the space around parts of the system
 - Time boundaries refer to example working hours, training sessions etc.
 - Space boundaries refer to the physical work area, office layout etc.
 - Task boundaries refer to the agreed upon job content and performance criteria
- **AUTHORITY:**
 - Authority refers to the formal and official power that the group experiences to perform its tasks, as given from above, below and from within
 - Authority can be formal or informal and can be given on different hierarchical levels

CIBART CONSTRUCTS

- **ROLE:**

- Role refers to the boundary description of what needs to be done in order to perform.
- The normative role refers to the objective job description
- The existential role refers to how the group believes it is performing
- The phenomenal role refers to what can be inferred by other's unconscious behaviour towards the group
- Role is seen as acting at the intersection between the individual on the one side and the organisation on the other.

- **TASK:**

- The task is the basic component of work
- The primary task acts as the driving force in the here and now, keeping the group in business or employed