

The Small Group Socialization Process

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After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. explain why individuals join groups,
2. define socialization from a communication perspective,
3. differentiate among the five phases of the Small Group Socialization Model,
4. describe the four outcomes of successful group socialization, and
5. identify and explain the socialization guidelines for newcomers and groups.

Case Study | Jason Erickson, Jamie Williams, Pat Simpson, Chris Walter, and Lei Zhong work in different departments at ASG Communication, Inc. While Jason and Lei are new hires, Jamie, Pat, and Chris joined the company more than two years ago. The company president asked this group to work on a project proposed by a new client, the March of Dimes.

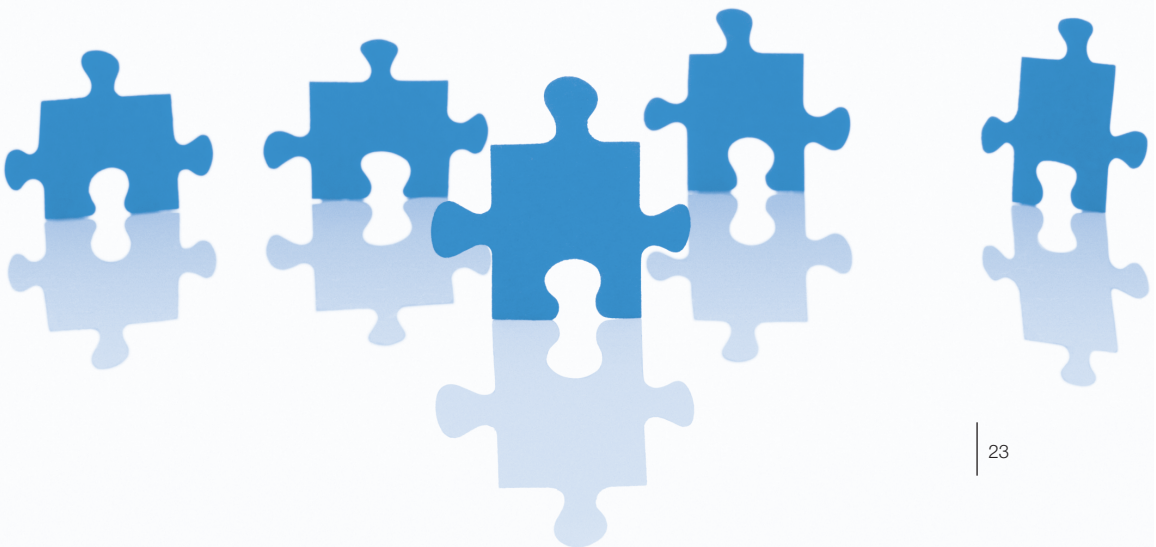




Photo 2.1 A positive socialization experience is necessary for group members to feel accepted in any small group, including work groups.

Source: ©iStockphoto.com/shironosov.

As a not-for-profit organization, the March of Dimes depends on volunteers. Its organizational goals include raising awareness about prevention of birth defects, as well as raising money for health education and research of this health issue. Besides this information, the group members knew no project details until they met their appointed March of Dimes representative.

No different from most group members meeting for the first time, Jason, Jamie, Pat, Chris, and Lei felt nervous about the project. Jamie and Pat had not worked together on a project before. Jason and Lei had experienced poor group relations at their prior employment organizations, where one or two group members completed most of the work and thus carried the load for the rest.

Michelle Lewis, promotions director for the March of Dimes, entered the meeting room with lots of handouts and a prepared presentation explaining the organization's mission and the multiple projects it needed the work group to complete. The first project, a "walk- and run-a-thon event," would be held in the summer, allowing the group just three weeks to design the event.

- Jason:** Let's get to know each other better. I think it will be important with all of these projects to bid on. Chances are we will be working long hours together.
- Lei:** We only have three weeks to come up with a plan. Who cares who we are? Let's talk about this project. That's what group members are supposed to be doing. I have responsibilities at home and have little time for socializing. My baby needs me.
- Jamie:** Come on, we have a few minutes. I think working on this project is great. My sister had a child with a birth defect, and the March of Dimes helped.
- Chris:** I agree with Lei. I work here all day and attend night school getting my master's degree. Let's just get to it. I can't spend extra time on this project.
- Pat:** Well, I see I'm going to have to take charge of this group. Who wants to do what?
- Jamie:** Look. We are all in this together, so lighten up. This project could be fun. Now, let's see what we know and what we need to know. Has anyone ever been involved in a "walk- and run-a-thon?"



As the above case study demonstrates, employees endeavoring to begin group work sometimes find establishing how best to proceed with the task, as well as building relationships, difficult. Tension among members arises, too, when personal goals appear more important than group goals. This case study well exemplifies "getting started" in group work and relationship building, especially in a work setting.

This chapter purports to highlight the processes and practices of socialization of group members and the group as a whole. To do so, we will discuss ideas surrounding why we join groups and how group members come together to work on tasks and build relationships through successful socialization. We will define socialization from a communication perspective, present a five-phase model of group socialization, discuss positive outcomes of socialization, and offer guidelines for competencies that will help you and your group members become successful in completing tasks and building positive relationships.



Photo 2.2 Attraction theory explains why some members are motivated to join a group.

Source: ©iStockphoto.com/Yuri_Arcurs.

Why Individuals Join Groups

Individuals join groups for several reasons, including attraction to a particular group, wanting to satisfy interpersonal communication motives, and possessing a lack of volition. Let's begin with attraction theory.

Attraction Theory

Why do individuals join a specific company's work group, the company's bowling team, the Association for Women in Science, or the Public Relations Society of America? According to **attraction theory**, your answer can be traced to one of four reasons.

First, individuals may enjoy the company's products or services. Once an applicant becomes an employee, such group activities as bowling might interest him or her specifically. Suppose you bowled in college and excelled at it; chances are you will want to play on the team because you like the game. Second, a group's goals may attract individuals; for example, some join such professional groups as the Public Relations Society for America because they provide scholarships for students in need of financial aid. In this instance, members like participating in a group whose goals include humanitarian work. Third, just the idea of group

membership may motivate a person to join. During college you may choose to pledge the fraternity to which your older brother belonged because you want to continue the family tradition. Fourth, individuals sometimes join groups because they like or feel a connection with one or more members. You might join a book club because your best friend is a member or you are physically attracted to and want to get to know a group member. Whatever the reason(s), attraction theory explains one reason why individuals join groups.



How does attraction theory explain why you have joined a group (or groups) at work?

Interpersonal Communication Motives

A second explanation behind individuals joining groups recalls the study of interpersonal communication motives, which addresses why people communicate in various contexts, such as groups. Researchers Rebecca Rubin and Matthew Martin (1998) argued that because communication is goal-directed, people often initiate and maintain interactions in order to satisfy their interpersonal needs. Why people interact, the means by which they interact, with whom they interact, and the content of the interactions all have been addressed by motives researchers who identify, simply, six **interpersonal communication motives** for communicating with people (Rubin, Perse, & Barbato, 1988; Schutz, 1966). These motives, or reasons, are detailed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Interpersonal Communication Motives

<i>Motive</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Inclusion	Member is motivated to communicate to have a sense of belonging.
Affection	Member is motivated to communicate to feel liked and to like others.
Control	Member is motivated to communicate to have the power to manipulate the environment.
Escape	Member is motivated to communicate to avoid other activities or stressful situations.
Pleasure	Member is motivated to communicate to have fun.
Relaxation	Member is motivated to communicate to unwind and lower anxiety.

Source: Based on Rubin, R. B., Perse, E. M., & Barbato, C. A. (1988). Conceptualization and measurement of interpersonal communication motives. *Human Communication Research*, 14, 602–628.

The benefits of group work include the opportunity to meet one or all six interpersonal communication needs. Group members motivated to communicate for pleasure, affection, inclusion, and relaxation note greater satisfaction and cohesiveness with their group experiences while members motivated to communicate for control note lower satisfaction with their group experiences (Anderson & Martin, 1995). Additionally, members motivated to communicate for pleasure and affection attend and respond to their members whereas members motivated to communicate for control and escape neither attend nor respond to their members (Anderson & Martin, 1995). Members motivated to communicate for pleasure and affection report communicating more pleasurable and affectionate messages with their groups whereas members motivated to communicate for control interact more frequently than the other group members (Anderson & Martin, 2002).

As such, we may be motivated to communicate with others at different times and for different reasons. For example, when job hunting you might join a service group because it looks good on your resume rather than a social group because you need inclusion or affection.

Lack of Volition

A third reason some people join groups is simply that they have no choice. Once you enter the workforce, you likely will be asked to join committees or a task force at your workplace. Because organizations often rely on small groups to accomplish their mission, part of your job may require membership in several small groups.

The next section in this chapter discusses a different view of communicative processes whereby group members meet each other's needs by coming together to work in groups and build relationships. This focus turns to the processes and practices of socialization.

Small Group Socialization

A relatively new area of scholarly research, socialization in small groups provides a fresh topic for discussion in small group communication classes. The bulk of socialization research and literature fits the organizational communication context, which focuses on how employees assimilate and adjust to organizational life. Yet, from a different perspective, we can view organizations as small groups functioning as microsystems embedded within the macrosystem of organizational life. Thus, this perspective suggests socialization processes and practices also are present in small groups. Consider a major *Fortune* 500 organization, such as Ford

Motor Company, whose collective membership could not possibly solve all its problems and make all its decisions. In reality, a smaller number of members, such as a management team, assume the responsibility of working through the processes and practices of solving problems and making decisions.

The remainder of this chapter specifies socialization in small groups and how group processes and practices affect the way members adjust and adapt to each other and group work. If the employees in the case study group had understood the need for member socialization, they might have gotten off to a better start than creating tension among themselves.



When you think about your work group, what does the word *socialization* mean to you?

Definitions of Socialization

Several definitions of socialization exist. Group scholars Sheldon Stryker and Ann Statham (1985) suggested socialization occurs when newcomers become part of the group's patterns of activities. Social psychologists have defined socialization as occurring when group members create shared meaning about who will do what and how the group will operate (Mead, 1958) or when individuals learn enough to contribute skillfully and competently to the group (Dion, 1985). Each of these definitions emphasizes the role of the individual.

Taking a different perspective, social psychologists Richard Moreland and John Levine (1982) defined socialization as a reciprocal process of group members and the group as a whole coming together to meet each other's needs and accomplish goals. This type of definition suggests individuals actively participate in the socialization process rather than simply adjust and adapt to an existing group culture. Additionally, each group's culture changes when a member joins the group because she might influence the existing members to adopt new ways of communicating and functioning as a group. Thus, consider socialization as a process affecting both individual members and the group as a whole.

Taking a communication perspective, Carolyn Anderson and her colleagues (Anderson, Riddle, & Martin, 1999) posited that **socialization** comprises a two-way process of influence (e.g., I talk you into liking my idea, and you talk me into expanding that idea) and change whereby group members use verbal and nonverbal messages to create a new and unique group culture. The interaction among members allows them to establish rules and roles, make decisions and solve problems, and reach both individual and group goals. Furthermore, the interaction helps group members reduce their levels of uncertainty about how to complete tasks, get along with each other, and meet each other's interpersonal communication motives. Bruce Riddle, Carolyn Anderson, and Matthew Martin (2000) also created

Assessment Tool 2.1 Small Group Socialization Scale

Complete each item in regard to your experience thus far in your small group. Rate each item in relation to the following scale by filling in the blanks with what you consider an appropriate answer.

If you **strongly agree** with the statement, write 5 in the blank.

If you **agree** with the statement, write 4 in the blank.

If you **neither agree nor disagree** with the statement, write 3 in the blank.

If you **disagree** with the statement, write 2 in the blank.

If you **strongly disagree** with the statement, write 1 in the blank.

- _____ 1. I understood what was appropriate dress for group meetings.
- _____ 2. I understood the authority the group had for doing its work.
- _____ 3. I did not see myself as an effective group member.*
- _____ 4. I understood the “group talk” the group used to do its work.
- _____ 5. I found someone in the group who could provide me with emotional support.
- _____ 6. It was clear what was expected of me in this group.
- _____ 7. I found someone in the group with whom I could talk about career plans.
- _____ 8. It was not at all clear what was expected of me in this group.*
- _____ 9. I depended on other group members for support in the group.
- _____ 10. I found someone in the group who could help me adjust to the group.
- _____ 11. I found someone in the group on whom I could depend for support.
- _____ 12. I had no clear idea of what this group was to accomplish.*
- _____ 13. I found someone in the group with whom I could discuss personal matters.
- _____ 14. There was no one in the group on whom I could depend for support.*

Scoring:

Reverse score all items marked with an asterisk. (If you put a 5 for item 3, change this score to 1; if 4, change this score to 2; if 2, change this score to 4; if 1, change this score to 5.) Sum all items to create a general socialization outcome score. The higher the score, the more positive the socialization experience.

Source: From Riddle, B. L., Anderson, C. M., & Martin, M. M. (2000). Small Group Socialization Scale: Development and validity. *Small Group Research*, 31, 554–572. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

a measurement scale for use in trying to understand the importance of socialization in small groups. Complete this scale to learn more about socialization.

To learn more about socialization, let's turn to a model of small group socialization that illustrates how socialization processes and practices function in groups.

Model of Small Group Socialization

In 1999, Carolyn Anderson and her colleagues introduced a **model of small group socialization** by using five phases to illustrate how communication influences socialization processes (see Figure 2.1). Phases are “different sub-periods within a total continuous period of interaction” (Bales & Strodtbeck, 1951, p. 485). As applied to group communication, each phase contains specific characteristics, either unique to that phase or appropriate across multiple phases. The phase-approach model helps group members understand how communication shapes socialization activities during the life span of groups. This model not only applies to members entering established groups; it also applies to zero history groups, such as the group illustrated in the case study.

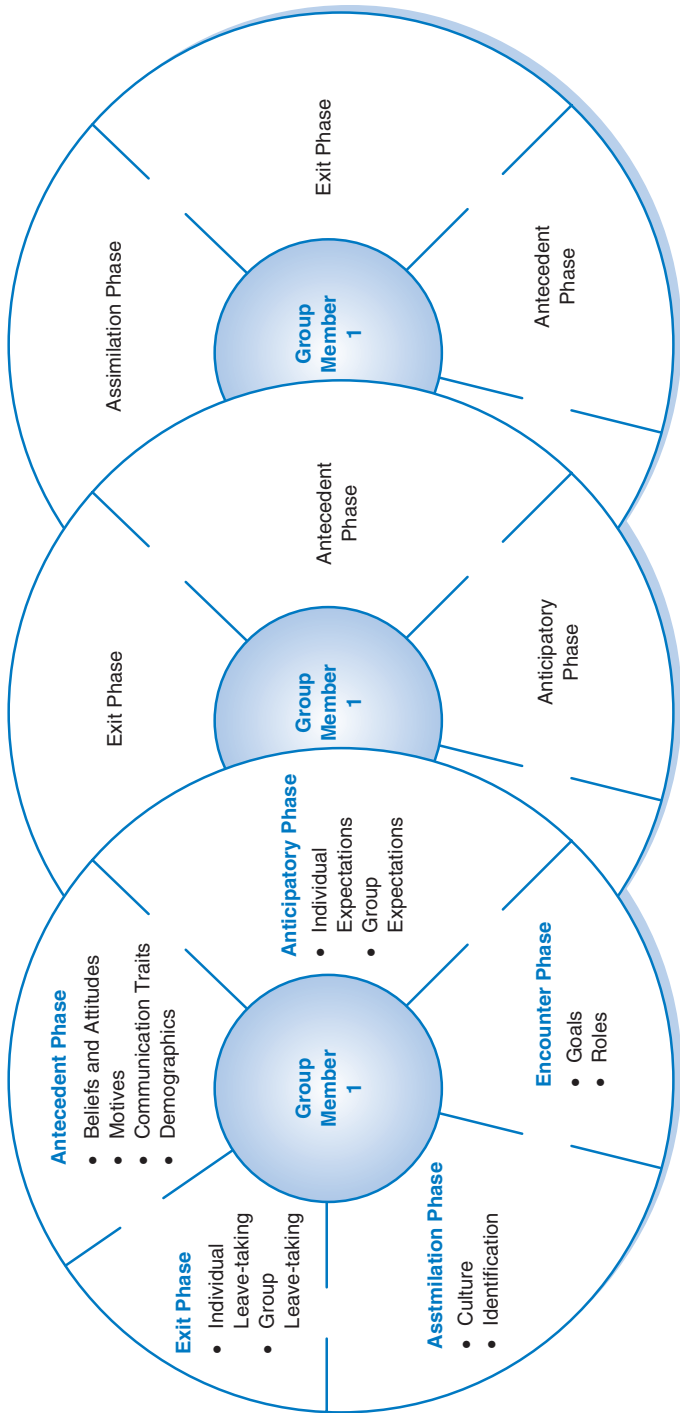
Antecedent Phase

The first phase is the **antecedent phase**. In the case study, some members expressed beliefs and attitudes, both positive and negative, about group work based on personal experiences or experiences shared by others. Researchers seem to agree that whether you're entering an existing group or a new group matters not; what you bring to a group—beliefs, attitudes, and communicative and personality traits—will influence the group's culture and members. Group scholars Joann Keyton, Nicole Harmon, and Lawrence Frey (1996) posited some group members develop negative feelings toward group work because of poor experiences with it. Such members may approach current groups with less commitment and optimism than those who enjoy group work thanks to prior positive experiences. We also bring our age, race, and sex to the group composition. Biases against how people look or their origins can impede socialization of group members, resulting in some feeling unwelcome or unwanted.

Anticipatory Phase

The second phase is the **anticipatory phase**, in which individuals decide what they expect from group membership as well as each group member. At the group level,

Figure 2.1 Group Socialization Model: Individual Member



Source: From Frey, L.R., Gouran, D.S., & Poole, M.S. (1999). *The handbook of group communication theory and research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Note: The model illustrates that in a group, individual members move through temporally and developmentally distinct socialization phases in a nonlinear cycle. Simultaneously, individuals belong to other groups likely to be in different phases of socialization processes.

existing groups form expectations about new group members. Equally, members of a **zero history group** (i.e., a group whose members never worked together before) harbor preconceived expectations for the group. Some researchers think the closer members come to meeting their and the group's expectations, the greater the likelihood of successful socialization (Van Maanen, 1976). According to scholar Meryl Reis Louis (1980), the group experience can prove stressful if expectations are unrealistic or not met upon entering the group. For example, in the case study, if Jason wants to spend time getting to know the group's members and Lei wants to solely focus on the task, they clearly project different expectations toward the group, the members, and the task.

Encounter Phase

During the third phase, called the **encounter phase**, individuals usually come together for the first time, either face-to-face or through other media (e.g., a computer software program or teleconferencing), and begin the process of establishing group goals and roles. Group scholar Dennis Gouran (1994) defined goals as what people want to achieve from joining groups, working in groups, and building relationships. One key to successful socialization in this phase is achieving the right balance among personal, group, task, and relational goals. To balance potential conflicts among the various goals, group members communicate by sharing, requesting, and receiving information. Furthermore, the members discuss acceptable behaviors and practices to assist them and the group with balancing group goal conflicts. Researchers have found members who achieve an acceptable balance among the various goals strengthen their commitment to the group and its members.

In addition, establishing roles and orienting members to their roles factor into the encounter phase. It is important to establish one critical activity in this phase: the adjustment and accommodation between individual members and the group over desirable role choices and appropriate role behaviors. Examples include negotiation among the members for the role of leader. In the case study, Jamie exhibits leadership behavior by directing communication to the task as well as attending to relational tensions by asking group members to "lighten up." As role positions and behaviors become established in this phase, expect them to continue as the members and group move to the next phase.

Assimilation Phase

In the fourth phase, the **assimilation phase**, new members accept the established group culture and begin to identify with the group and its members. As applied to groups, culture encompasses members creating a unique group and using

communicative behaviors exclusive to their group to make sense of what they do (Swogger, 1981). These behaviors might include rites and rituals—for example, the group members in the case study meeting in the lobby coffee shop instead of in Lei’s office. Sometimes, however, group members find themselves adopting the established culture but also trying to change it as the group moves through the process of task work and maintaining relationships. Researcher Richard Moreland (1985) offered that how long it takes to establish a group’s culture affects how long it will take for successful assimilation of each member.

Identification contributes necessarily to successful assimilation of members into groups. Oftentimes, group members refer to assimilation as “we-ness” or the feeling of “group-ness.” Continually accomplishing tasks and building relationships allows individual members and the group to communicate while creating and



At what point did you realize you had reached the assimilation stage of socialization in a current or prior work group? How long did it take for you to reach this stage?

re-creating their identity. Successful assimilation occurs when each member sees his values and interests coinciding with those of the group. Problems arise when a group member finds he cannot accept other members’ attempts to change the group’s course of direction.

In such instances, the member experiences a break in the feeling of “we-ness” and may be forced to leave the group. The case study challenges Lei and Chris to take the time to help establish a group culture and identity during the assimilation phase.

Exit Phase

The fifth phase is the **exit phase**. Members exit learning, work, and social groups, and the groups themselves may end. In the case study, the group gets three weeks to complete the project, after which the group ends. On the other hand, if you quit your job, you leave the group, but the group remains as part of the organization. Group scholars are beginning to focus on group endings and individual leave-taking effects as key factors in the exit phase because they are thought to influence attitudes about future groups and behaviors in them (Sinclair-James & Stohl, 1997).

Scholar Joann Keyton (1993) offered that when groups end, members should meet one last time to evaluate their work, celebrate a job well done, and say goodbye. This is good advice—one reason stems from the fact that all members of successful groups experience the tensions associated with disbanding a successful group and sustaining the friendships built in them. In some cases, when group conflict is high, a final meeting can defuse emotions and force the members to reflect on the positive points of their group experience.

When individuals voluntarily leave an existing group, such as a work team, they form impressions and attitudes about their experience and add it to their

library of experiences (Anderson et al., 1999). After a poor experience, an individual may struggle to identify with another work team and be less receptive to future socialization processes. Leave-taking, when a member quits or drops out, can affect groups positively or negatively. One positive example describes the established members welcoming to their group a new individual who brings a needed expertise to share. A negative leave-taking might force established members to spend time socializing a new member and confronting the process of change.

In summary, the model of small group socialization illustrates in five phases how group members bring competencies, attitudes, and beliefs to each group to which they belong (Anderson et al., 1999). Socialization processes begin in anticipating the group and its members. Once members come together, their unique communicative interactions help them establish ground rules and norms in building an identity. When the members feel comfortable with the group and each other, they engage in the assimilation phase, which binds and helps them make sense of their collective task. After completion, group members must confront life without that group membership, and when individuals leave the group, their exit affects how they confront life without that group experience. The next section explores the outcomes of successful or unsuccessful small group socialization.

Outcomes of Socialization

A large body of small group research focuses on task and relational outcome factors as measures of successful (or unsuccessful) small groups and member relationships. Similarly, successful groups benefit from positive **socialization outcomes**, which describe how members and the group as a whole feel about how they cooperated and succeeded in completing goals. Four group outcomes relate to group socialization: cohesion, consensus, communication satisfaction, and loneliness.

Cohesion

Although various definitions of cohesion exist, Dorwin Cartwright (1968) discussed cohesion from a member's perspective. He defined **cohesion** as a member reaching an acceptable level of desire to stay in the group. Furthermore, he identified such factors as attraction among group members, evaluation of the group's chances for success, and identification with the group as ways to view and measure cohesion. Subsequently, group scholars continue to expand ideas associated with cohesion; some researchers suggest that cohesion can result from the task, the relationships, or a blending of both. At the group level, groups can be perceived as cohesive by displaying their "we-ness," such as by all members wearing

the same shirts. As for the relationship between cohesiveness and socialization, two studies have reported that members who perceive their socialization processes as positive also perceive their groups as cohesive (Anderson & Martin, 2001; Riddle et al., 2000).

Consensus

On occasion groups reach agreement on decision-making tasks or group goals through a process known as consensus. **Consensus** means all group members agree with and commit to the decision (DeStephen & Hirokawa, 1988). Consensus takes preference over majority rule (e.g., “Three members win against two members”) and compromise (e.g., “I don’t like arguing, so I’ll give in”) because groups reaching consensus often reach cohesion. In general, group scholars Sunwolf and David Seibold (1999) suggested members reaching consensus feel better about and want to remain in their groups. Because consensus closely relates to cohesion, Riddle et al. (2000) predicted consensus also would relate to positive socialization practices—a supported prediction. Plausibly, this finding results from socialization processes and practices creating an atmosphere where members feel comfortable communicating with the group and each other and thus successfully navigate decision-making processes that permit full member participation.

Communication Satisfaction

Communication scholar Michael Hecht (1978) offered what now holds sway among the popular definitions of communication satisfaction, describing it as a “felt experience,” or when people experience feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the communication that takes place interpersonally. As applied to the group setting, scholars have suggested **communication satisfaction** describes members who walk away from group meetings or from the group feeling positively fulfilled from the experience (Anderson & Martin, 1995; Anderson, Martin, & Riddle, 2001).

In a review of the group satisfaction literature, Richard Heslin and Dexter Dunphy (1964) reported satisfaction can be viewed from three dimensions:

1. how members see consensus in their group concerning each member’s role,
2. judgments of the group’s progress toward reaching goals,
3. freedom to participate in group interaction.

Notice these factors also relate to concepts illustrated in the model of small group socialization. To support these ideas, researchers have found in three studies



Photo 2.3 When group members experience loneliness, they also may experience negative feelings toward the group task and their group members.

Source: ©iStockphoto.com/aldomurillo.

that members' reports of positive socialization experiences positively correlate with members' reports of satisfaction with the communication in their group (Anderson & Martin, 2001; Anderson et al., 2001; Riddle et al., 2000).

Loneliness

Not all group experiences are positive. The same holds true for socialization experiences in groups. Stephen Worchel (1994) described **loneliness** in the group setting as a powerlessness some members feel from not being able or allowed to participate in the group's process (e.g., not feeling free to contribute ideas or opinions). Furthermore, Jon Hess (1993), a professor of communication studies at the University of Dayton, suggested loneliness results from socialization practices that include only the task dimension and fail to attend to the relational dimension of group work. According to Joann Keyton (2000), the relational side of group work is as important as the task; in fact, the two dimensions are interdependent.

Loneliness may be an understudied factor in groups because it is hard to imagine a person feeling lonely in a small group. Carolyn Anderson and Matthew Martin (1995) reported group members experience loneliness as a result of dissatisfaction

with the communicative processes and practices in the group. In effect, loneliness closely relates to negative perceptions of cohesion, consensus, and communication satisfaction in the group.

In another study, Bruce Riddle and his coauthors (2000) found support for the speculation that positive socialization processes and practices result in members not

“ *Ethically Speaking:* Should employees be trained in how to engage in positive socialization processes and practices in groups so that no member experiences loneliness? Why? ”

feeling lonely. Their results make sense. Remember, people join and work in groups to meet needs associated with inclusion, affection, and control (Schutz, 1966). Furthermore, people also have needs associated with motives for communicating in groups. When these types of needs are not met through positive socialization processes and practices,

newcomers or members in newly formed groups often experience frustration, isolation, and feelings of alienation in the group. Loneliness, then, may lead to negative feelings about groups or a member's exit.

Socialization Guidelines

In the final section of this chapter, we offer **socialization guidelines** as ideas for the successful socialization of members to help ensure success, from the perspective of both the new member and the group. Although not exhaustive, the ideas presented provide a basic foundation for groups and group members to consider as they confront and move through socialization processes and practices.

New Member Socialization

Some group scholars suggest four guidelines for successful new member socialization. In this instance, individuals become successfully socialized into an existing group, such as when a new member joins a company's public relations staff, a department club, or a bowling team. Table 2.2 defines these guidelines.

The bottom line requires that your attitudes and behaviors fit with the attitudes and beliefs already established by the group. For example, if the group has agreed that meetings start on time, arriving late for a meeting violates the group's norm concerning members' behaviors. This violation will cause tensions in the group as members decide how to apply a sanction to your actions. Further, group members expect you as a newcomer to learn all you can about your role by gathering information, asking questions, and seeking feedback from other members.

Table 2.2 Socialization Guidelines

<i>As a new member, you should:</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. embrace the values, norms, and behaviors established in the group, 2. acquire the skills and knowledge needed to assume appropriate roles, 3. learn what is and what is not important, 4. move from a non-performing member to a contributing member.
<i>As a group member, you should:</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. recruit individuals who will fit in and contribute to the attainment of group goals, 2. initiate new members in formal orientation sessions or individually in work group, 3. include the new group member in group activities, 4. engage in a mentoring relationship with the new member.

John Van Maanen (1976) offered that sometimes new members get frustrated because they do not have the information they need to perform their role, they receive conflicting information, or they have too much information thrown at them too fast or too soon. Nonetheless, new members' obligations include acquiring the skills they need to perform.

Robin Lester (1987) suggested also that new members often worry too much about failure and evaluation. In this case, they may attempt to overextend and burn themselves out. Ideally, new members should seek advice from established members as to the priority of factors important to a group's success. Lastly, established members and the new member eventually should feel comfortable working together to reach task goals (McComb, 1995). Of course, this comfort also includes a positive relational climate for cooperation (Keyton, 2000). The goal requires each member to work at helping the group balance the tensions associated with task and member relationships.

In summary, consider the four guidelines when a new member joins an established group. Also, when you find yourself entering a zero history group, these guidelines serve as a basis for discussion in helping each member share ideas associated with adjusting and adapting to each other in building group goals.

Group Socialization

At the group level, members may want to consider the recommended guidelines for the group as a whole to practice in striving for successful socialization of new members. These guidelines, defined in Table 2.2, concern recruitment, initiation, inclusion, and mentorship.

According to scholars Richard Moreland and John Levine (1984), the group searches for individuals who will fit and “contribute to the attainment of group goals” (p. 182). Perhaps simultaneously, the prospective member looks for groups to fill personal needs. When each party commits to the relationship, prospective members become new members. Successful recruitment requires clear group goals, appropriate steps for investigating potential members, and a determination of whether the group can meet individual needs of potential members.

Preparing the new member for entry into the work group is important. For example, Gareth Jones (1986) established that in organizational groups, initiation may comprise formal tactics, such as orientation sessions where new members “go through common learning experiences designed to produce standardized responses to [a] situation” (p. 264). In such cases, not only do the new members learn about the benefits associated with organizational membership; they also may hear speeches by leaders who echo the mission and goals of the organization. One benefit of this method is all new members receive the same training. Yet, in the case of smaller group settings or informal social groups, individualized socialization practices uniquely offer a new member the opportunity to learn “the ropes” from various members and perspectives. This type of exposure allows the new member to interact by asking questions and receiving feedback interpersonally in less formal settings.

As we discussed earlier in this chapter concerning motives for communication, inclusion is key (Schutz, 1966). Group members ensure the inclusion of new members in established group activities. For example, if, once a month after meetings, the group meets for dinner to socialize, it should communicate in such a manner that a new member feels not only encouraged to attend but welcome.

Group members need to consider mentoring the newcomer. Although the mentor-protégé relationship primarily remains a topic of organizational communication and research (Noe, 1988), the mentoring concept applies to groups. We conceptualize **mentoring** as an interpersonal relationship between an experienced member and an inexperienced member whereby the experienced member facilitates the professional and social development of the new member. In this sense, the mentor acts as a sounding board for the new member when she seeks advice and feedback concerning her performance.

A Final Note About the Small Group Socialization Process

Although group member socialization can assist both the new member and the group in maximizing the potential toward task accomplishment, one downside to socialization exists: For optimal socialization to occur, group members must

establish trust all around. **Trust**, as conceptualized by Richard Moreland and John Levine (2002), involves group members' willingness to "take a chance" on each other. Without trust, new members likely will fail to gain acceptance by established group members and established members will remain wary of new members. As such, a lack of trust may explain why some group members never fully socialize, perceive their socialization experience as negative, or simply remain uncommitted to the group task.

Conclusion

This chapter endeavored to highlight the processes and practices of socialization of group members and the group as a whole. In this chapter, we discussed ideas surrounding why we join groups and how group members come together to work on tasks and build relationships through successful socialization. We defined socialization from a communication perspective, presented a five-phase model of group socialization, discussed positive outcomes of socialization, and offered guidelines for competencies to help you and your group members become successful in completing tasks and building positive relationships. The next chapter focuses on what members bring to the group in the form of communication and personality traits. Keep in mind how member communication and personality traits might influence small group member socialization.

Discussion Questions

1. Attraction theory states people join groups because they like the group's activities and/or goals, the group itself, or one or more of its members. The work group members in the case study joined the group because their job required it. Does this make a difference? Why?
2. For each phase of the model of small group socialization, generate a list of other factors that might pertain to successful socialization. How would the members in the case study have benefited from knowledge of the importance of successful socialization processes and practices?
3. Would such demographic characteristics as age, race, and sex make a difference as work groups move through the five phases of socialization? Do members experience more positive socialization experiences in same-sex or opposite-sex groups? Why?
4. Suppose you were asked to train a dysfunctional group in communication. Which ideas in this chapter would you include in the training? Why?
5. Choose a group to which you currently belong. Identify five ways you and your group members could create a positive socialization experience for a new member.

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