



Psicologia dei Gruppi e delle Relazioni Sociali

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Theoretical Lessons (Part 1):

- 1- An introduction to the group dynamics (1)**
- 2- An introduction to the group dynamics (2)**
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- 5- Formation**
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- 7- Structure**
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Lesson: 2 - (1/4)

Title: *An introduction to the group dynamics*

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Lesson 2 Outline

- ***The nature of group dynamics***
- ***The scientific Study of Groups***
- ***The significance of Groups***
- ***A multilevel approach to the study of groups***
- ***Topics in Contemporary Group Dynamics***

The nature of group dynamics

Group dynamics describes both a subject matter and a scientific field of study.

Kurt Lewin (1951) described the way groups and individuals act and react to changing circumstances, he named these processes group dynamics. But Lewin also used the phrase to describe the scientific discipline devoted to the study of these dynamics.

Later, Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander supplied a formal definition, calling it a “***field of inquiry dedicated to advancing knowledge about the nature of groups, the laws of their development, and their interrelations with individuals, other groups, and larger institutions***” (1968).



Are groups real

When anthropology, psychology, sociology, and the other social sciences emerged as their own unique disciplines in the late 1800s, the dynamics of groups became a topic of critical concern for all of them.

- Sociologists studying religious, political, economic, and educational social systems highlighted the role groups played in maintaining social order.
- Anthropologists, as they studied one culture after another, discovered similarities and differences among the world's small tribal groups.
- Political scientists' studies of political parties, voting, and public engagement led them to the study of small groups of closely networked individuals.



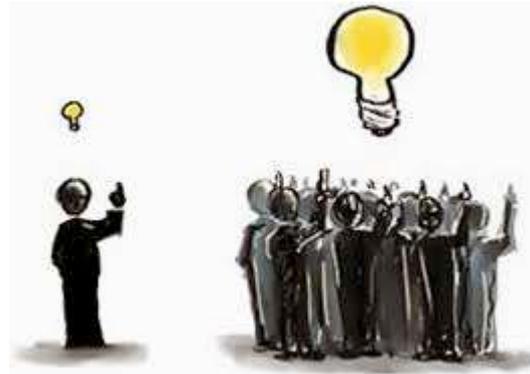
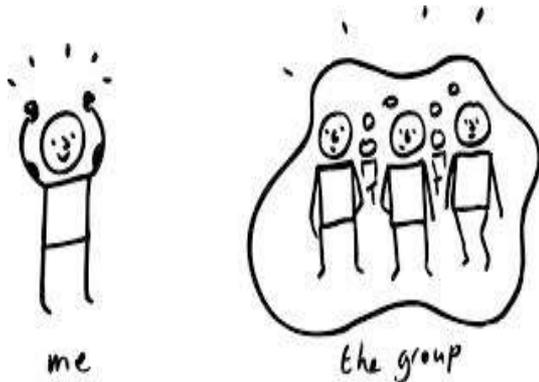
In 1895, Gustave Le Bon, who was trained as a physician, published *Psychologie des Foules* (Psychology of Crowds), which describes how individuals are transformed when they join a group.

Wilhelm Wundt (1916), recognized as the founder of scientific psychology, also studied groups extensively. His book *Völkerpsychologie* is sometimes translated as “folk psychology,” but others suggest that the best translation is “group psychology.” It combined elements of anthropology and psychology by examining the conditions and changes displayed by elementary social aggregates, and how group memberships influence virtually all cognitive and perceptual processes.

Level of analysis

Almost immediately theorists disagreed about the level of analysis to take when studying groups.

- **Individual-level analysis** focuses on the person in the group to explain the behavior of each group member, and to know if such psychological processes as attitudes, motivations, or personality were the true determinants of social behavior.
- **Group-level analysis** that assumes each person is “an element in a larger system, a group, organization, or society. And what he does is presumed to reflect the state of the larger system and the events occurring in it” (Steiner, 1974, p. 96; 1983, 1986).



Collective Conscious

Group-level researchers believed that groups and the processes that occurred within them were scientifically authentic.

Émile Durkheim (1858/1917), for example, argued that individuals who are not members of friendship, family, or religious groups can lose their sense of identity and, as a result, are more likely to commit suicide. Durkheim strongly believed that widely shared beliefs what he called **collective representations** are the cornerstone of society, and went so far as to suggest that large groups of people sometimes act with a single mind. He believed that such groups, rather than being mere collections of individuals in a fixed pattern of relationships with one another, were linked by a unifying **collective conscious** (Jahoda, 2007).





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Are Groups More Than the Sum of Their Parts?

The debate between individual-level and group-level approaches waned, in time, as theorist developed stronger models for understanding group-level process. Kurt Lewin's (1951) theoretical analyses of groups were particularly influential. His field theory is premised on the principle of interactionism, which assumes that the behavior of people in groups is determined by the interaction of the person and the environment.

$$B = f(P, E)$$

The interactionism formula proposed by Kurt Lewin that assumes each person's behavior (B) is a function of his or her personal qualities (P), the social environment (E), and the interaction of these personal qualities with factors present in the social setting.

Lewin believed that, because of interactionism, a group is a Gestalt a unified system with emergent properties that cannot be fully understood by piecemeal examination. Adopting the dictum, "The whole is greater than the sum of the parts," he maintained that when individuals merged into a group something new was created and that the new product itself had to be the object of study.

N SOCIAL R M S

Are Group Processes Real?

Consider, for example, the concept of a group norm. A **norm** is a **standard that describes what behaviors should and should not be performed in a group**. Norms are not just individual members' personal standards, however, for they are shared among group members. Only when members agree on a particular standard does it function as a norm, so this concept is embedded at the level of the group rather than at the level of the individual.

The idea that a norm is more than just the sum of the individual beliefs of all the members of a group was verified by Muzafer Sherif in 1936.



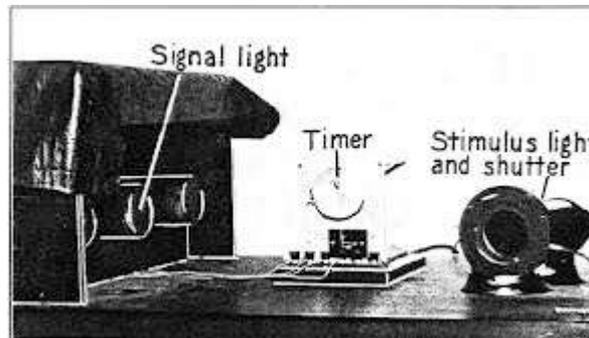
Are Group Processes Real?

Sherif literally created norms by asking groups of men to state aloud their estimates of the distance that a dot of light had moved.

He found that the men gradually accepted a standard estimate in place of their own idiosyncratic judgments. He also found, however, that even when the men were later given the opportunity to make judgments alone, they still based their estimates on the group's norm.

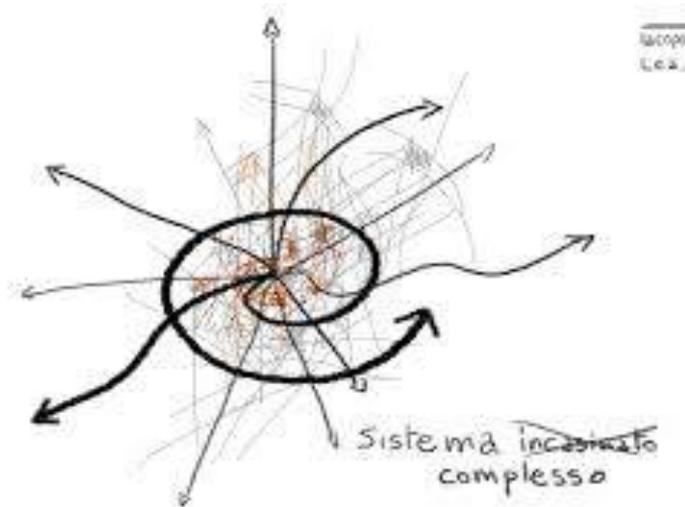
Moreover, once the group's norm had developed, Sherif removed members one at a time and replaced them with fresh members. Each new member changed his behavior, in time, until it matched the group's norm. If the individuals in the group are completely replaceable, then where does the group norm "exist"?

It exists at the group level rather than the individual level (MacNeil & Sherif, 1976).



Are Groups Dynamic?

Kurt Lewin (1943, 1948, 1951), who many have argued is the founder of the movement to study groups experimentally, chose the word dynamic to describe the activities, processes, operations, and changes that transpire in groups.



This word suggests that groups are powerful and influential: they change their members and society-at-large. Dynamic systems are also fluid rather than static, for they develop and evolve over time. Do groups deserve to be called dynamic?



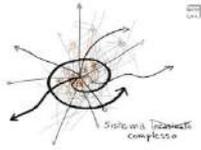
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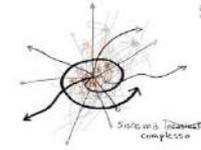
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Lesson 2: Introduction to group dynamics



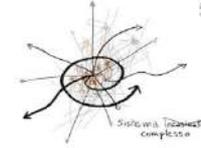
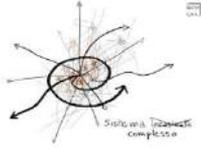
Group influence their members

As researchers gathered more and more data about groups and group processes they became more firmly convinced that if one wishes to understand individuals, one must understand groups.

Groups, they concluded, have a profound impact on individuals; they shape actions, thoughts, and feelings. Some of these changes are subtle ones.

- **Moving from isolation to a group context can reduce our sense of uniqueness, but at the same time it can enhance our ability to perform simple tasks rapidly.** Triplett, 1898, verified the discontinuity between people's responses when they are isolated rather than integrated, and this shift has been documented time and again in studies of motivation, emotion, and performance.
- **Groups can also change their members by prompting them to change their attitudes and values as they come to agree with the overall consensus of the group** (Newcomb, 1943). As Cooley (1909) explained, people acquire their attitudes, values, identities, skills, and principles in groups, and become practiced at modifying their behavior in response to social norms and others' requirements.
- **As children grow older their peers replace the family as the source of social values** (Harris, 1995), and when they become adults, actions and outlooks are then shaped by an even larger network of interconnected (Barabási, 2003).
- **Groups also change people more dramatically.** The earliest group psychologists were struck by the apparent madness of people when immersed in crowds, and many concluded **that the behavior of a person in a group may have no connection to that person's behavior when alone.** Stanley Milgram's (1963) classic studies of obedience offered further confirmation of the dramatic power of groups over their members, for Milgram found that most people placed in a powerful group would obey the orders of a malevolent authority to harm another person. Individuals who join religious or political groups that stress secrecy, obedience to leaders, and dogmatic acceptance of unusual or atypical beliefs (cults) often display fundamental and unusual changes in belief and behavior.

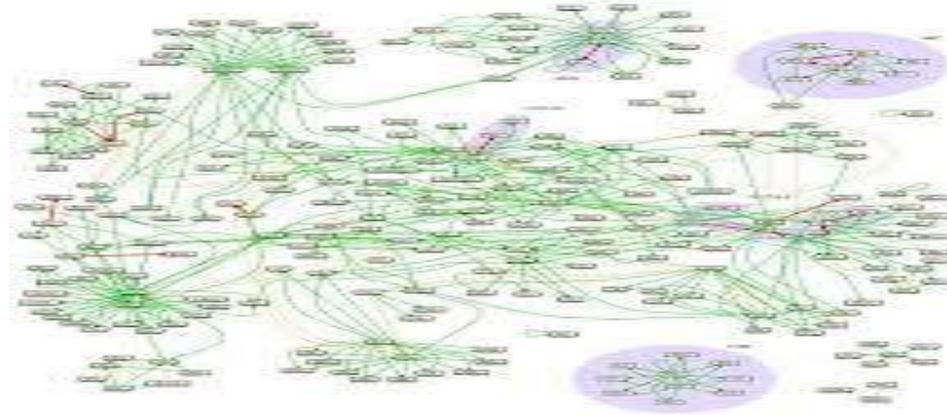
Groups may just be collections of individuals, but these collections change their members (Richard, Bond, & Stokes-Zoota, 2003).



Groups influence society

At the same time researchers were verifying the dramatic ways in which groups influence individuals, researchers studying societal structures were documenting the role that groups played in maintaining religious, political, economic, and educational systems in society.

- After the industrial revolution, legal and political systems developed to coordinate actions and make community-level decisions. Organized religions provided answers to questions of values, morality, and meaning.
- Educational systems took over some of the teaching duties previously assigned to the family.
- Economic systems developed to regulate production and the attainment of financial goals.



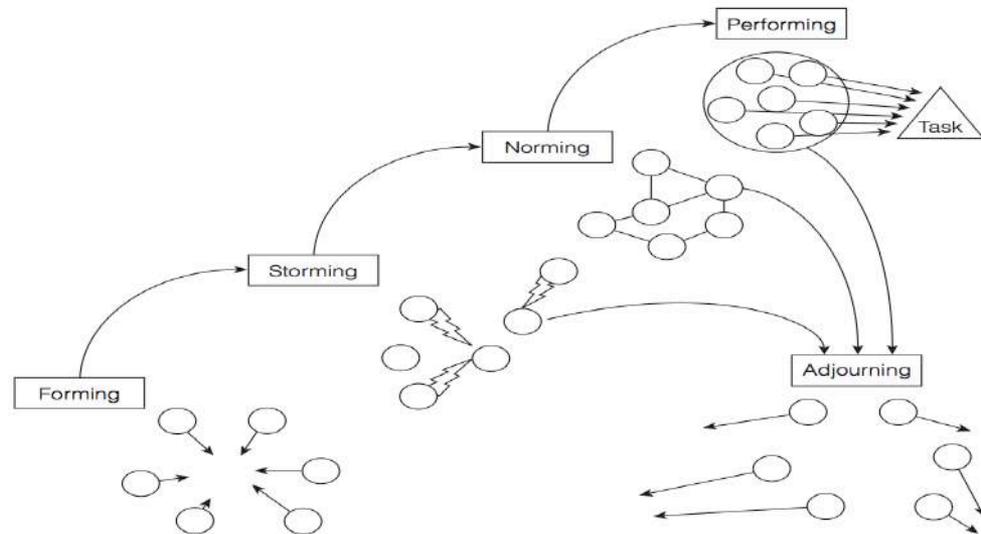
All these social systems were based, at their core, on small groups and subgroups of connected individuals. Religious groups provide a prime example. Individuals often endorse a specific religion, such as Christianity or Islam, but their connection to their religion occurs in smaller groups and congregations. These groups are formally structured and led by a religious authority, yet they provide members with a sense of belonging, reaffirm the values and norms of the group, and strengthen bonds among members (Krause, N., 2006). At the collective level, communities, organizations, and society itself cannot be understood apart from the groups that sustain these social structures.

Groups Are Living Systems

A holistic perspective on groups prompted researchers to examine how a group, as a unit, changes over time.

Some groups are so stable that their basic processes and structures remain unchanged for days, weeks, or even years, but such groups are rare. Bruce Tuckman's theory of group development, for example, assumes that most groups move through five stages summarized below (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

- Forming phase, the group members become oriented toward one another.
- Storming phase, conflicts surface in the group as members vie for status and the group sets its goals.
- Norming phase. These conflicts subside when the group becomes more structured and standards emerge.
- Performing phase, the group moves beyond disagreement and organizational matters to concentrate on the work to be done.



The group continues to function at this stage until it reaches the adjourning stage, when it disbands. Groups also tend to cycle repeatedly through some of these stages as group members strive to maintain a balance between task-oriented actions and emotionally expressive behaviors (Bales, 1965).

A group, in a very real sense, is alive: It acquires energy and resources from its environment, maintains its structure, and grows over time (Arrow et al., 2005).



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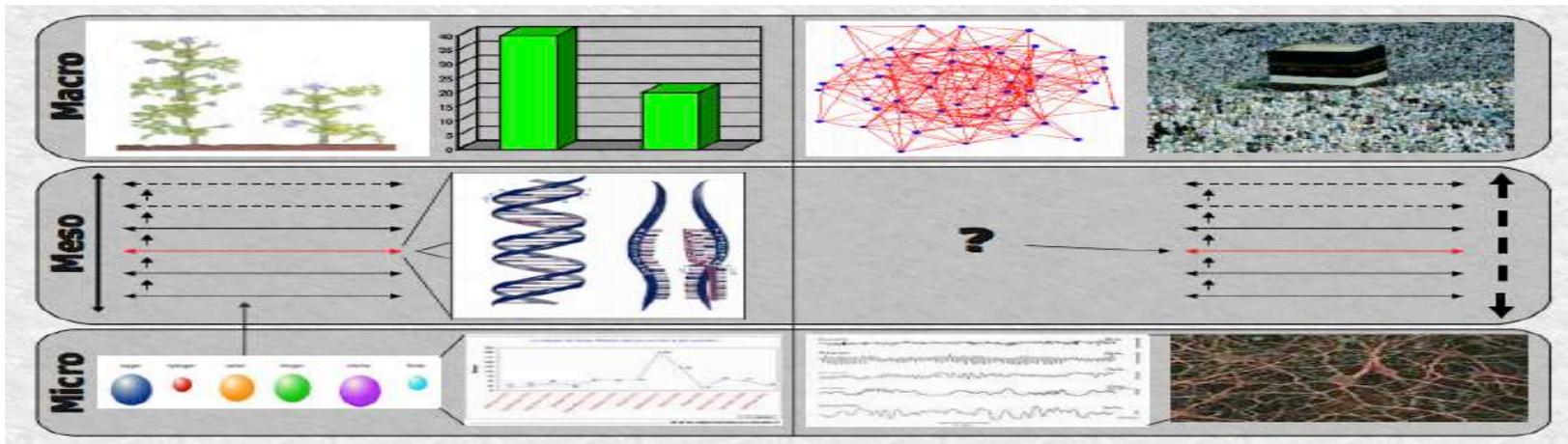


The Multilevel Perspective

In time the rift between individual-level and group-level researchers closed as the unique contributions of each perspective were integrated in a multilevel perspective on groups.

This approach suggests that group dynamics are shaped by processes that range along the **micro-meso-macro continuum**.

- **Micro-level factors** include the qualities, characteristics, and actions of the individual members.
- **Meso-level factors** are group-level qualities of the groups themselves, such as their cohesiveness, their size, their composition, and their structure.
- **Macro-level factors** are the qualities and processes of the larger collectives that enfold the groups, such as communities, organizations, or societies. Groups, then, are nested at the meso-level, where the bottom-up micro-level variables meet the top-down macro-level variables.



The Multilevel Perspective

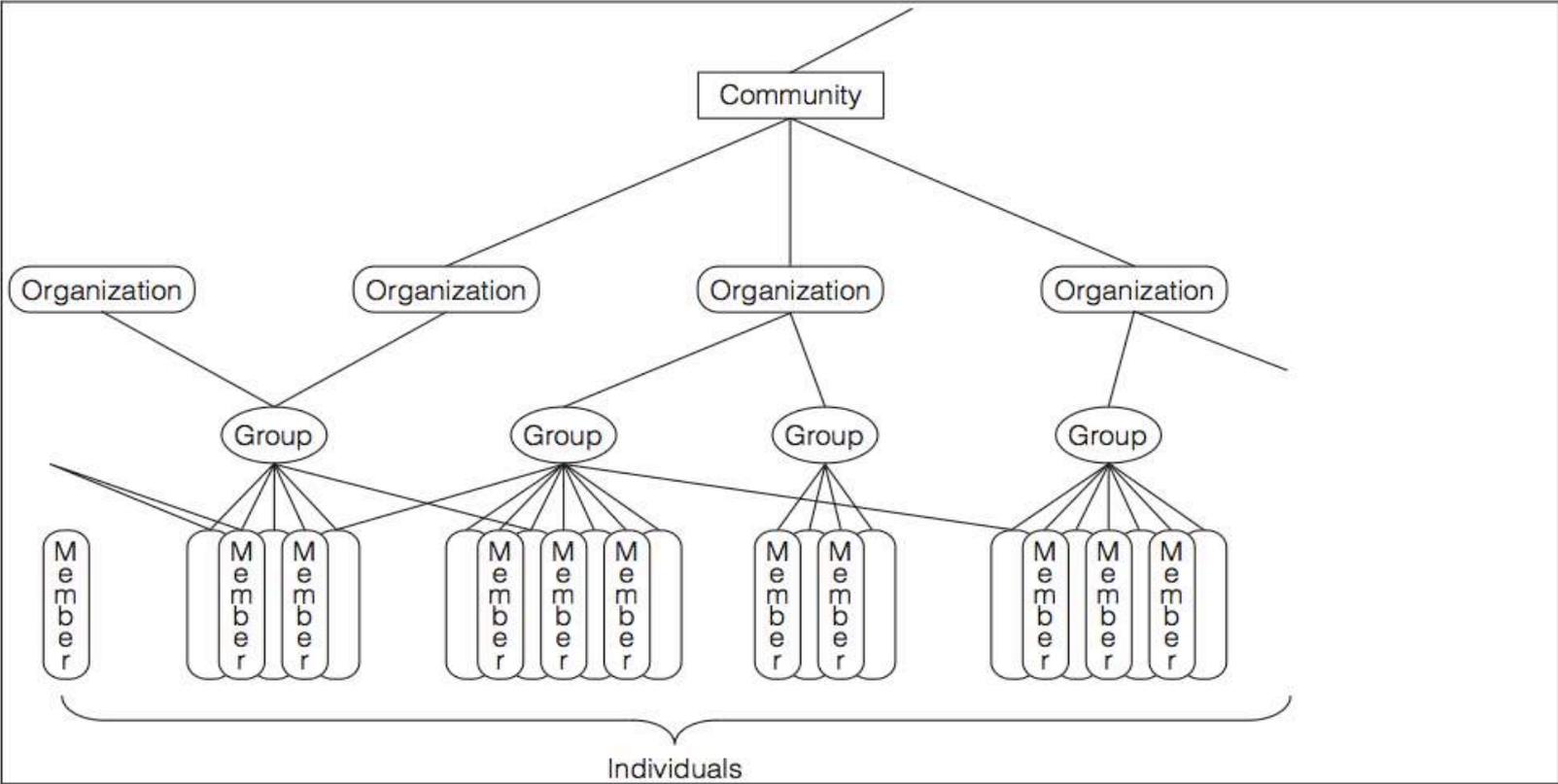


FIGURE 1.6 A multilevel perspective on groups. Researchers who study groups recognize that individuals are nested in groups, but that these groups are themselves nested in larger social units, such as organizations, communities, tribes, nations, and so on. Researchers may focus on one level in this multilevel system, such as the group itself, but they must be aware that these groups are embedded in a complex of other relationships.



Topics in Contemporary Group Dynamics

<i>Chapter and Topic</i>	<i>Foundation</i>
Introduction to group dynamics	What are groups and what are their key features? What do we want to know about groups and their dynamics? What assumptions guide researchers in their studies of groups and the processes within groups?
Studying groups	How do researchers measure the way groups, and the individuals in those groups, feel, think, and behave? How do researchers search for and test their hypotheses about groups? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various research strategies used to study groups? What general theoretical perspectives guide researchers' studies of groups and the people in them?
Inclusion and identity	Do humans, as a species, prefer inclusion to exclusion and group membership to isolation? What demands does a shift from individuality to collectivity make on people? How do group experiences and memberships influence individuals' identities?
Formation	Who joins groups and who remains apart? When and why do people seek out others? Why do people deliberately create groups or join existing groups? What factors influence feelings of liking for others?
Cohesion and development	What factors promote the increasing solidarity of a group over time? What is cohesion? As groups become more unified, do they develop a shared climate and culture? How do groups develop over time? What are the positive and negative consequences of cohesion and commitment?



Topics in Contemporary Group Dynamics

<i>Chapter and Topic</i>	<i>Foundation</i>
Structure	What are norms, and how do they structure interactions in groups? What are roles? Which roles occur most frequently in groups? How and why do status networks develop in groups? What factors influence the group's social structure? What are the interpersonal consequences of relational networks (based on status, attraction, and communication) in groups?
Influence	When will people conform to a group's standards, and when will they remain independent? How do norms develop, and why do people obey them? Do nonconformists ever succeed in influencing the rest of the group?
Power	Why are some members of groups more powerful than others? What types of power tactics are most effective in influencing others? Does power corrupt? Why do people obey authorities?
Formation	Who joins groups and who remains apart? When and why do people seek out others? Why do people deliberately create groups or join existing groups? What factors influence feelings of liking for others?
Leadership	What is leadership? If a group without a leader forms, which person will eventually step forward to become the leader? Should a leader be task focused or relationship focused? Is democratic leadership superior to autocratic leadership? Can leaders transform their followers?
Group performance	Do people perform tasks more effectively in groups or when they are alone? Why do people sometimes expend so little effort when they are in groups? When does a group outperform an individual? Are groups creative?



Topics in Contemporary Group Dynamics

<i>Chapter and Topic</i>	<i>Foundation</i>
Decision making	What steps do groups take when making decisions? Why do some highly cohesive groups make disastrous decisions? Why do groups sometimes make riskier decisions than individuals?
Teams	What is the difference between a group and a team? What types of teams are currently in use? Does team building improve team work? How can leaders intervene to improve the performance of their teams?
Conflict in groups	What causes disputes between group members? When will a small disagreement escalate into a conflict? Why do groups sometimes splinter into subgroups? How can disputes in groups be resolved?
Intergroup relations	What causes disputes between groups? What changes take place as a consequence of intergroup conflict? What factors exacerbate conflict? How can intergroup conflict be resolved?
Groups in context	What impact does the social and physical setting have on an interacting group? Are groups territorial? What happens when groups are overcrowded? How do groups cope with severe environments?
Groups and change	How can groups be used to improve personal adjustment and health? What is the difference between a therapy group and a support group? Are group approaches to treatment effective? Why do they work?
Crowds and collective behavior	What types of crowds are common? Why do crowds and collectives form? Do people lose their sense of self when they join crowds? When is a crowd likely to become unruly?