

## Summary of the Givens

The givens which we have discussed relate to the group, the group task and the group environment variables. The group variables were three-fold: size, member characteristics and hidden agendas. We argued that group size in terms of effectiveness, is related to the nature of the task. In terms of member characteristics, we focussed attention on Belbin's team roles and the idea that heterogeneous teams are the more effective. Finally, in terms of the group variables, the issue of hidden agendas was explored and it was in this context that we introduced the notion of groupthink.

The two task-related givens, that is, the nature of the task and effectiveness criteria, were then explored. In terms of the task, we argued that to be effective, the demands that it makes on the group must be met. We then examined the criteria by which performance is assessed as an important determinant of the operation of the group.

Finally, we addressed the three-fold environmental 'givens': the physical setting, the cultural setting and leader and member status. We stressed the importance of the physical location and its effects on interaction and the influence of cultural norms as a 'given'. Finally, we mentioned the leader's power and the standing of the group as impacting on effectiveness.

We now examine the intermediate or intervening factors which also help determine group effectiveness. As such factors can be changed more easily than the givens, they are arguably of more importance to those seeking to improve group performance.

## 4.3 Intervening Factors

We examine these factors under three headings:

- **style of the leader**
- **group functions**
- **interaction patterns.**

Each of these can be adapted or changed in the short term to take account of the givens and so make possible enhanced effectiveness.

### **Style of the leader**

The contingency approach to leader effectiveness is obviously relevant here since it advocates that group leaders must bring their style to fit other situational variables such as the nature of the task and the requirements of subordinates.

## Group functions

For a group to be effective, two sets of functions must be undertaken. These are the **task functions** and the **maintenance functions**, and unless there is an appropriate combination of these two sets of processes, successful performance is undermined. Task functions, as the name suggests, are processes concerned with the accomplishment of the group's task. The task processes which ought to happen in any group are, for example:

- **initiating** – defining a problem, proposing a task, etc
- **information seeking** and giving
- **opinion seeking** and giving
- **clarifying** – clearing up confusions
- **evaluating**
- **decision making.**

Now while it is the responsibility of the leader that these functions are done, they may be spread among a number of group members. Task-orientated processes lead to the second set of processes, the maintenance functions. Maintenance functions are processes concerned with maintaining the group as an entity so that the task is accomplished. The maintenance processes which ought to happen in any group are, for example:

- **encouraging**
- **expressing feelings** – sensing, sharing
- **harmonising** – reconciling disagreements
- **compromising** – to maintain cohesion
- **gate-keeping** – keeping all communication channels open
- **setting standards** – to achieve, to evaluate achievement.

Again, these may be spread among a number of members and indeed, some may carry out both task and maintenance functions. The key point is that these two functions must be performed by some member(s) of the group or team to attain member satisfaction and performance.

Of course, it is possible to observe and record individual member behaviour in groups in terms of their performance of these two sets of functions. Trained observers can chart their behaviour on pre-designed forms which distinguish between member behaviours in terms of the functions being performed. Such behavioural analysis can, of course, become very complicated, especially when non-verbal behaviour is included in the framework, but the principle behind it is straight forward. An example of a section of a form designed so that the observer can record the performance of certain task and maintenance functions is given in Figure 2.

Group I Date	C				
	A	B	D		E
	Alan	Betty	Clare	Denis	Erica
Information seeking	II	I		III	II
Opinion giving	I	I	III	I	II
Clarifying	III	II	I	II	I
Decision making		I			III
Encouraging	II	III	II	I	III
Harmonising	I	III	II	II	II
Compromising	III	I	II	III	
Gate-keeping	I	II	I		

**Figure 2**

The completed observation forms can be invaluable as a basis for discussing both individual and group performance in terms of the different functional behaviour inputs. These behaviours can be charted and discussed within the group over time so that an optimum balance can be arrived at. When we were discussing hidden agendas, we mentioned the behavioural analysis of the Swiss Re group’s board meetings. In this case, the analysis aimed at making the board meetings more effective and the framework used looked at such factors as the length and style of contributions. Observer feedback and discussion helped shorten and better structure the meetings and the games were dealt with both at individual and board meeting level. A fuller report of what was done at Swiss Re is given in the article by Tim Dickson. The group can also influence its interaction pattern, as can the leader. Before we explore interaction patterns, however, that is the third intervening factor, try the following activity.

**Q** **ACTIVITY 13: QUESTION**

Re-read Activity 10 case study, *John Simpson, Fifty-Cycle Sales Manager*, and answer the following question.

For a group to be effective, two sets of functions need to be undertaken. These are the task functions and the maintenance functions. Under these two headings, which functions do you feel were performed at the directors’ meeting?

**A** **ACTIVITY 13: ANSWER**

The task functions, that is those processes concerned with the accomplishment of the directors’ task, include, for example, the managing director initiating and perhaps evaluating, the marketing director information and opinion seeking and giving, the personnel director clarifying, the production director evaluating, and so on.

The maintenance functions, that is those processes concerned with maintaining the group as an entity so that the task can be accomplished, include the majority of the directors expressing feelings. There was perhaps some compromising by the production director.

## Interaction patterns

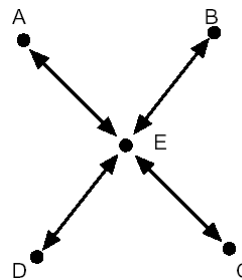
The pattern of communication between group members affects both member satisfaction and performance. Shaw (1978) carried out a number of studies looking at the effects of different communication networks, classifying them into **centralised networks** and **de-centralised networks**. He identified three forms of centralised networks which are illustrated in Figure 3. These are:

- **the chain**
- **the wheel**
- **the 'Y' network.**

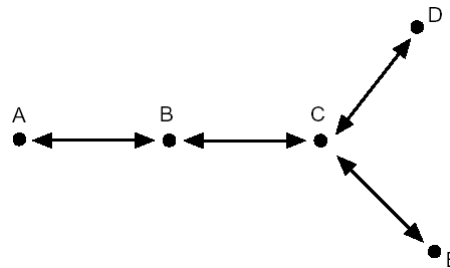
(i) The Chain



(ii) The Wheel



(iii) The 'Y' Network

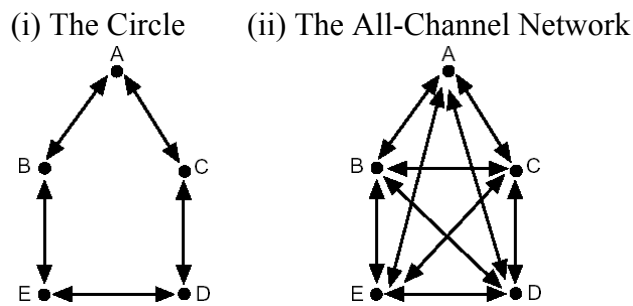


*Figure 3: Centralised networks*

In centralised networks, in order to communicate with others in the group, members have to go through one individual, usually the leader, who is at the centre. This means, of course, that the central individual has much more information than the rest and so these networks are associated with more autocratic styles of management.

In terms of the de-centralised networks, Shaw identified two main forms which are illustrated in Figure 4. There are:

- **the circle**
- **the all-channel network.**



**Figure 4:** De-centralised networks

In de-centralised networks, members do not have to go through a control individual and there is a free flow of information between them all. Democratic styles of management tend to be associated with these forms of network.

The relationship between network type and group member satisfaction is:

- satisfaction tends to be highest in decentralised networks where information and decision-making is shared
- in centralised networks, by definition, decision-making is located at the centre and those members outside of it do not feel involved. Overall member satisfaction is thus lower.

The effects of network types on task performance is:

- if tasks are simple, then centralised networks result in faster and more effective performance
- where tasks are complex, on the other hand, decentralised networks result in faster and more effective performance.

What we suggest then is that a knowledge of such feelings can be used to help adapt the group interactive patterns to fit the task in hand. There is no one best pattern of communication.

### **Q** ACTIVITY 14: QUESTION

Again refer to the Activity 10 case study, identify the form of network being used by the directors and comment on its appropriateness.

### **A** ACTIVITY 14: ANSWER

The form being used was the all-channel network and for such a complex task as deciding whether or not John Simpson should be appointed to the post of marketing manager, it was entirely appropriate.

The givens then, and the intervening factors which can be changed in the short term to take account of them, determine the outcomes. As we have stated, they determine member satisfaction and group productivity.