

GROUP DYNAMICS AND TEAM FUNCTIONING IN ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

In all kind of organization many activities are done by groups and teams. But how are they formed? What factors influence their existence and development? How members of groups and teams are selected? Which are the consequences in organizational context? In order to answer these questions, in the present paper we describe and analyze the main approaches regarding the formation of work groups and work teams (sociometric approach and group dynamics approach), the main factors that affects group dynamics and the FIRO model for evaluation the team members' needs.

Key words: group, team, group dynamics, team functioning, FIRO model

JEL Classification: C93, D23, L29, M12, O15

I. INTRODUCTION

In a very broad sense group dynamics is interpreted, on the one hand, as all psychosocial phenomena that occur, is manifested and evolve in small groups and, on the other hand, as all laws governing and directing these phenomena (Forsyth, 2010, p.23). In a more narrow sense, group dynamics appears to be the set of methods and procedures that enable action on personality through the group or the methods of action of these groups on other larger groups. In this sense, the group appears as a mean of influence, of training, both of his own and of other groups, focusing not on “what happens in the group” as in the first case, but on “change”, on “formation” (Forsyth, 2010, p.27).

In general, teams are studied within organizations in terms of their effectiveness and efficiency whereas they are formed for a specific purpose and measurable objectives, while groups are analyzed mainly in wider contexts, according to certain criteria and with different aims. Thus, in our view, in organizational context “group dynamics” corresponds to “team functioning” (although many authors consider them synonyms) since it is also important within an organizational team (work team) to what extent attitudes, opinions and aspirations of members can be modified not by external forces, but actually by using the team itself as a mean of action.

II. SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT CONCERNING THE FORMATION OF WORK GROUPS AND WORK TEAMS

For a long time it was thought that the choice of criteria by which work groups must be constituted would be better to be objective, respectively to be considered mainly socio-demographic characteristics of future members of work groups (age, gender, nationality etc.) or socio-professional (education, qualifications, seniority). However, over time, with the development of psychology, especially of social psychology, has been found that work groups can be formed also following psychological, subjective criteria and were formulated various psychological conceptions and also proposed practical modalities concerning the settlement of work groups. In the literature have been mainly outlined two such conceptions which emphasize the role of psychological factors in the formation as well as normal and efficient functioning of work groups: J.L. Moreno's school of thought and Kurt Lewin's school of thought; first is the creator of sociometry, the last is the initiator of group dynamics insight.

Sociometric approach

During his research on cohabitation and working groups from the Hudson colony, Moreno came to a series of findings and conclusions that allowed him to develop his sociometric conception on work groups' formation. Sociometric school starts from the well-known theory of “human relations”, according to which the compliance with human factor, along with other categories of factors, such technical or technological factors, is essential for the proper functioning of the work groups. Strictly considering the individual phenomena, such as desires, needs, goals, ideals, motives of individuals, is not sufficient. Moreno proposes along with these phenomena, the

acknowledgment of interpersonal, psychosocial phenomena, such as sympathetic relations between people, between them and the groups to which they belong.

Hence, according to Moreno, work groups will be composed of those individuals who are attracted to and like each other. But finding individuals who all attract each other is very difficult, so that the work group will be consisting of individuals who all favor the same person who is able to influence them (preferably the group leader), even if they do not prefer or even can reject each other. This information may be gathered using the sociogram.

Sociogram can be used to determine which informal groups exist within the organization and who are the members of these groups (Certo, 2002, p.508). The information provided by sociogram can be combined with the knowledge of existing formal groups (depicted by organizational chart), which will enable managers to know the whole picture of the groups structure within organization.

Furthermore, managers can use sociometry to find out information such as the identity of group leader, the relative status of group members and also the networks of group communication (Burduş, 2005, p.317).

Sociometric analysis can provide many managers with useful information regarding informal groups within the organization, knowledge that will enable them to know how to encourage the development of adequate informal groups, i.e. groups that support the organization's goals and whose members maintain good working relationships within formal work groups (Vancea, 2008, p.114).

Comparison between organizational chart and sociogram can highlight a number of phenomena which may either facilitate or hamper the actual functioning of social organizations – in particular, the functioning of their teams – indicating a range of measures aimed at harmonious merging of these two types of structures, because only such an equilibration is able to contribute to maximum capitalization of the existing human potential (Vlăsceanu, 2003, p.63).

Dynamics approach

The school of thought centered on group dynamics started from the Kurt Lewin's general-theoretical conception which states that group exists in a continuous movement, change, evolution. According to Lewin's conception, organization is the "dynamic whole" in which "force field" (individual, group, team) are in constant motion, resulting in changes also on other subdivisions of "social field". In other words, a change within an organizational structure, which can be, if really necessary, a team (Zoltan, 2012), will determine smaller or bigger modifications at the system level, that is at the entire organization level.

Three basic concepts help Lewin to draw the implications of the concept of group dynamics: dynamic whole, social self and social field. *Dynamic whole* consists of all the interdependent elements; *social self* includes the individual value systems shared with other groups; *social field* contains social entities, integrated with each other and having a relative position of constituents, which means that when in the state of some subdivisions occurs a change, this will spread over another subdivision, leading to its modification (Zlate, 2008, p.444).

Lewin defines the group in physical terms of "force field", forces that have different intensities and orientations. According to Lewin, the group is a "social field" whose essential feature is the "relative position of its entities that are part of the field. ... It expresses the fundamental possibilities of movement within the field" (Lewin, 1967 as cited in Zlate, 2008, p.424). Within the group may occur and take action a plurality of forces, which give rise to a quasi-equilibrium if they are equal in intensity. To maintain the balance of power in the group, it is necessary the use of forces in the desired direction, the reduction of the opposed forces or setting them into a state of conflict (Lewin in De Visscher, P., Neculau, A. (coord.), 2001, p.89). Thus, for the development of group are needed tensions, contradictions either within the group or between one group and another.

In accordance with Lewin, it is necessary that the group should consist of people able to cause such tensions or conflicts which would lead to progress, and if there is no such people in group, they must be introduced from outside the group. These are, in fact, the two practical ways recommended by Lewin for the formation of work groups: reactivation of the so-called "radioactive atoms" in the group, when they exist, or introducing them from outside if they are not to be found within the group (Lewin in De Visscher, P., Neculau, A. (coord.), 2001, p.68).

III. FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCE GROUP DYNAMICS

In order to attain a unified vision about work group dynamics, as a domain which integrates the issue of team functioning, we select from the multitude of external and internal conditions of group existence only those who seem to be more significant and with obvious effects both on group life and on its work efficiency. Schematically, the main external and internal factors which influences group dynamics are: natural factors and technical-material factors, socio-cultural factors and specific social factors.

Natural factors and technical-material factors

For a work group, the natural environment is formed by that set of physical conditions under which the work take place (temperature, humidity, lighting, noise, vibrations, etc.) and technical-material environment consists of space itself, the room in which people work, with all its annexes, including the crucial role of machines, tools, their positions, the space between them etc. (Zlate, 2008, p.453).

In psychology are known the research showing that spatial proximity usually leads to mental closeness, while the spatial distance is associated with psychic distance (Forsyth, 2010, p.454). It is a very important aspect of studying team, given the cohesion and interdependence necessary to its functioning. As a result, social-affective relationships of inter-acquaintance, inter-communication, inter-valuing between members of organizational groups will be facilitated or, conversely, perturbed by the distances at which there are placed both organization offices and various spaces intended to teamwork, from branches geographically dispersed to the level of offices.

As regards the technical and material environment, its influence on the group is more direct and pronounced than those of the natural environment. For example, production technique, especially the automatic one leads to either work groups dismantling (people working alone in front of switchboards) or decrease the number of people engaged in work groups. Then, one will be the structure of groups in which communication is verbal, face to face, and another when it is achieved through technical means. Some phenomena of distortion, filtering, interference, blockage etc. will be either magnified or diminished.

Therefore, the concept of natural environment must be understood more in the sense of geographical environment, than of technical environment as a “world of things” or “built environment”, but both loaded and impregnated with social meanings. This is because spatial proximity is one of the most accurate predictors of interpersonal attraction (Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 2005, p.124), and the most relevant forms of social interactions occur in face to face situations. As a result, spatial proximity, understood as part of the technical and material environment in which teams display their activities, is critical for interaction between members.

Socio-cultural factors

Various socio-cultural factors, such as family, neighborhood, social group, work environment, living environment, residential arrangements, directly influence the dynamics of work groups and productive activity in organizations.

Since the two poles between which an individual conducts his or her own activity are work environment and living environment (the first being oriented towards production and therefore dependent on its technical level, and the other one, towards the intimacy, private life in groups or families or, generally said, towards social life), his or her integration in work environment will be facilitated or hampered precisely by the particularities of living environment, therefore by socio-cultural factors. In this situation can occur the so-called “cultural distance” between the two types of environment: the more traditional is the socio-cultural environment, reserved towards renewal and change, towards assimilation of new rules and behavioral patterns, the more difficult will be the individual integration in a different work environment (Arrow, McGrath & Berdahl, 2000, p.65).

Furthermore, if members of groups attribute to each other stereotypical characteristics associated with membership of a particular social group or category, this will lead to interpersonal and relational conflicts due to distortions in social information processing (Curşeu, 2005, p.23).

Specific social factors

This category of factors refers to formal relations that are established between groups within the larger unit to which they belong, in this case, the organization. The internal dynamics of a group will be influenced by its own history of relations between members, but also by the history of the group relations with other groups in the organization.

Proper social relationships are formal, official relations, prescribed by rules and regulations. Besides them, however, there are informal, psychological relationships between groups, which may overlap with the first and / or can act in parallel with them. It is certain that a “short-circuit” occurred on the route of formal relations restructures also the route of informal relations (Zlate, 2008, p.458).

Afterwards, in the category of specific social factors which affect group dynamics we can also subsume the socio-economic factors (which derives from the level of economic and financial development of an organization, from phenomena of expansion and diversification or those of absorption or fusion etc.), socio-professional factors (focused on the level of professional training, the level of qualification, seniority, competences acquired, etc.) or socio-demographic factors (gender, age, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, etc.).

IV. FIRO MODEL AND TEAM FUNCTIONING

According to some authors (Altman, Valenzi, & Hodgetts, 1985, p.465), factors that influence the internal dynamics of groups and teams can be divided into three categories: individual factors, intragroup factors and intergroup factors. In the first category of factors are included biographical circumstances and physical attributes

of individuals, skills and intelligence, personality; in the second, communication networks and decision making, and in the third, the phenomena of cooperation and conflict.

One of the most popular and influential models which starts mainly from the first category of factors (individual factors), is that developed by Schutz (1958 and 1967) under the name of FIRO (*Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation*). This model is based on the following assertion: the personal characteristics determine the interpersonal needs of the individual, and these appear as a major variable in group behaviors. Focusing on the interaction between two persons, Schutz developed his theory on two concepts: interpersonal needs and behavioral expressions. FIRO model includes three personal needs (inclusion / integration, control and affection) and two behavioral expressions (expressed and desired), their intersection resulting in a multitude of situations that appear in interpersonal relations between people. (Figure 1)

		Behavioral expressions	
		Expressed (Behavior initiated or expressed in relation with others)	Desired (Preferred behavior from others)
Interpersonal needs	Inclusion or interaction	High: Individual initiate actions with others.	High: The individual feels the need to be included by others.
		Low: The individual does not initiate actions with others.	Low: The individual does not feel the need to be included by others.
	Affection or friendship	High: The individual wants to interact in a personal manner with others.	High: The individual wants that others to interact with him or her in a personal manner.
		Low: The individual does not wish to interact in a personal manner with others.	Low: The individual does not want that others to interact with him or her in a personal manner.
	Control or influence	High: The individual feels the need to control the others.	High: The individual feels the need to be controlled by others.
		Low: The individual does not feel the need to control the others.	Low: The individual does not feel the need to be controlled by others.

Figure 1. FIRO model

Source: Zlate, M., *Tratat de psihologie organizațional-managerială*, vol. I, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2008, p.467

In the literature it is considered that FIRO model provides insights about human behavior in a given situation. For example, an individual with a high level of inclusion need will tend to refuse a job that requires a low social interaction. A person with a high level of affection need will not feel good in an isolated post, where employees are discouraged to speak. An employee with a high level of control need will tend to avoid a group where members have high levels of inclusion and affection needs, but a low level of control need (Altman, Valenzi, & Hodgetts, 1985, p.247). In other words, Schutz’s theory argues that teams composed of people with compatible needs (such as those who are very authoritarian and those who are very obedient) will be more effective than teams whose members have incompatible needs. Compatible teams involve a balance between those who dictate or exercise control, inclusion and affection and those who are subject to or receive control, inclusion and affection (West, 2005, p.49).

However, it may become difficult to use FIRO model to assess the compatibility of individual behavior in teams when they are made up of more than two persons and their composition and the environment in which they operate changes frequently. To achieve this assessment it is necessary a deeper analysis of intra-group behavior, particularly in terms of communication and group decision making (Liddell & Slocum, 1976), but especially it must be provided an adequate organizational context in which the expected behaviors of teams members to be exhibited.

In these circumstances, it is necessary to also address other factors and criteria in building an organizational team, such as: the nature of the task, the organizational context in which operates or will operate the team (depending on its stage of evolution), the organizational structure in which the team is or will be enframed, the establishment of norms and other features stemming from the nature of relationships, starting with organizational ones (authority relations) up to those that are established over time by members’ taking care of various roles necessary for team functioning.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The two views on work groups development presented in this article, namely Moreno's sociometric approach and Lewin's groups dynamics theory, are opposed by their content, by the focus on issues that they actually generalizes (cooperation and competition; positive affective relations and conflict, negative affective relations), by their advantages and disadvantages (what is advantage or positive effect for one of them is disadvantage or negative effect for the other one and vice versa), by their overall characteristics (sociometric system is stable, closed, based on excessive balance of forces, leading to stability, to stagnation; dynamics system is evolving, open, based on the unstable equilibrium of forces, leading to progress) (Vlăsceanu, 2003, p.61).

Criticizing the stable, closed system of the sociometry followers, wherein excessive equilibrium of internal forces leads to stability and often to stagnation, the dynamics design advocates for the dynamic, open, evolutionary system, wherein the unstable equilibrium leads to progress. This unstable equilibrium must not exceed certain limits considered optimal, otherwise may occur phenomena that lead to the destruction of the system.

Although the two views on work groups formation appear to be opposite and contradictory, in reality there is a point of their intersection, namely that both theories absolutize psychological factors, but they are not the only ones that need to be taken into account in forming work groups, even that for a long time it have been addressed only socio-demographic and socio-professional criteria. Thus, it must be considered also various organizational factors that will influence the very specific work relations in groups and teams, as well as those that form and influence the work environment.

Each group operates in certain environmental conditions, in certain circumstances, which allow that the situation, the surrounding environment, whether natural or social, to leave their mark on the internal organization and functioning of the group, group being a broader category in which team come under. (Zoltan & Vancea, 2015). The concept of environment must be understood both as environment itself, immediately contiguous to the group and also as the wider environment, beyond the immediate frameworks of the group, such as socio-cultural environment, which affects organizational environment and climate, both of them having stable, long-lasting and strong effects on groups and teams. Therefore, knowing the potential impacts of the factors that influence both group dynamics and team functioning can lead to effective and efficient construction of groups and teams in the organizational environment. Further, by using tools for assessment of members' personal needs as FIRO model managers can assure to a large extent keeping within the bounds the dynamic equilibrium of groups and teams. This dynamic equilibrium is a prerequisite for the evolution of work groups and work teams and the only one that can lead to necessary innovation and development within current organizations.

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