

International OB

Group Cohesiveness Across Cultures

A recent study attempted to determine whether motivating work groups by giving them more complex tasks and greater autonomy resulted in increased group cohesiveness. Researchers studied bank teams in the United States, an individualist culture, and a collectivist culture in Hong Kong. Regardless of their culture, teams with difficult tasks and more freedom to accomplish them were more tight knit and their performance was enhanced.

However, the teams in individualist cultures responded more strongly to increases in task complexity and autonomy, became more united and committed, and, as a result, received higher performance ratings from their supervisors than teams from collectivist cultures. Collectivists appear more sensitive to the moods of their co-workers, so the motivation and positive mood of one group member is likely to spill over to increase motivation and positive moods in others. Why do these cultural differences exist? One explanation is that collectivist teams already have a strong predisposition to work together as a group, so there's less need for increased teamwork. This conclusion is supported by other research showing collectivists are less likely to engage in social loafing when working in groups than are individualists.

What's the lesson? Managers in individualist cultures may need to work harder to increase team cohesiveness. One way to do this is to give teams more challenging assignments and provide them with more independence.

Sources: Based on R. Ilies, D. T. Wagner, and F. P. Morgeson, "Explaining Affective Linkages in Teams: Individual Differences in Susceptibility to Contagion and Individualism-Collectivism," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92, no. 4 (2007), pp. 1140–1148; E. M. Stark, J. D. Shaw, and M. K. Duffy, "Preference for Group Work, Winning Orientation, and Social Loafing Behavior in Groups," *Group and Organization Management* 32, no. 6 (2007), pp. 699–723; and D. Man and S. S. K. Lam, "The Effects of Job Complexity and Autonomy on Cohesiveness in Collectivist and Individualistic Work Groups: A Cross-Cultural Analysis," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, December

Class Exercise

1. Divide the class into teams of three to five students.
2. Have the groups go to:
http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=PublicationURL&_tockey=%23TOC%236575%232009%23999799996%231024669%23FLA%23&_cdi=6575&_pubType=J&view=c&_auth=y&_acct=C000059727&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=108938&md5=a23938a4d73d32f084809e9eff830eab and select article 10.
3. Although they should read the entire article, the important points are in the Discussion section 4.0 and Practical Application in section 4.1.
4. Then go to <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>.
5. Assign three countries or have the students select countries at random.
6. Compare the results of each country's "individualistic" assessments.
7. Have the students determine the implications of the first article on management practices in countries assessed in the Hofstede analysis.
8. Ask the groups to prepare a discussion for the class and to present their finding.
9. Open the class to discussion about the conclusions made.
10. The analysis by the groups will depend heavily on which countries are selected for analysis. But, they should find which countries are highly individualistic and

which will apply the conclusion of the study toward the relationship between cohesiveness and individualism.

Myth or Science?

Are Two Heads Better Than One?

Two heads are not necessarily always better than one. In fact, the evidence generally confirms the superiority of individuals over groups when brainstorming. The best individual in a group also makes better decisions than groups as a whole, though groups do tend to do better than the average group member.

Research also indicates that groups are superior only when they meet certain criteria. These criteria include:

1. Diversity among members. The benefits of “two heads” require that they differ in relevant skills and abilities.
2. The group members must be able to communicate their ideas freely and openly. This requires an absence of hostility and intimidation.
3. The task being undertaken is complex. Relative to individuals, groups do better on complex rather than simple tasks.

Class Exercise

This will require you to buy Lego® blocks or borrow them from your children.

1. Create a simple model—a building, a plane, whatever—because you need to provide Legos® to each team and individual to recreate it. (Three to eight sets.)
2. Count the number of Legos®, diagram the model, noting both the location, size, and color of the Legos®. This will be your master.
3. Select two teams of three to five, and at least three individuals. The rest of the class will observe and help you.
4. Give the groups and the individuals the same instructions on the exercise. Ask them to tell you when they have completed the task.
5. Select one student to create a time chart on the board and record when each unit—group or individual—begins to build and their completion time.
6. Select two students to be “certifiers”; they will go to the individual or team when they are done and certify the accuracy of their model.
7. Select one student to monitor the model, which needs to be outside of the class, in another location.

Instructions

1. This is a timed exercise. They have 30 minutes. The goal is to recreate the model accurately and quickly.
2. They must visit the model in another room. They may not touch it, but they may sketch it.
3. Teams may assign responsibilities any way they desire; all members may view the model, but only one at a time.
4. Once they are ready to replicate the model they must notify you, and they may NOT return to the model again.
5. They must build their replicates in your classroom and cannot take the Legos® with them.
6. Though teams have grown in popularity as a device for employers to organize people and tasks, we should expect resistance to any effort to treat individuals

solely as members of a group— especially among workers raised in capitalistic economies.

Discussion

When you call time, some will be done, some will not, and some will be lost. Discuss what type of task this was—complex or simple. Note the performance, time, and accuracy. Discuss with the class why things turned out as they did. What happened in the groups?

An Ethical Choice

How Groups Infect Your Behavior—And How to Immunize Yourself

Most organizations face scores of ethical decisions every day. When ethics and self-interest align, the choice is easy. Very often, however, the two choices aren't perfectly aligned and we must choose between what is expedient and what is ethical. What drives such choices?

Given the topic of this chapter, it won't be surprising to learn that one factor appears to be groups. Earlier we discussed how individuals tend to engage in more deviant behavior when working in groups than when they're working alone. Here we're interested in a related group effect: how individuals respond to dishonesty they perceive in the group.

A recent research study suggested some surprising group dynamics, and some implications for our own ethical behavior. First, whereas observing cheating on the part of "in-group" members (people who are similar to us and we like and identify with) increased an individual's propensity to cheat, cheating on the part of "out-group" members decreased it.

Second, other research suggests that cheating in groups is reduced by making moral standards explicit. This fits with research showing that drawing attention to moral standards can reduce dishonesty in a group. In one condition, participants were asked to read the Ten Commandments and were then given an opportunity to cheat. In the other condition, participants were given the same chance to cheat, but without the moral reminder. Participants in the first group didn't cheat at all, whereas those in the second group cheated a lot.

As the authors of one of the studies notes, "Dishonest behavior can be contagious."

1. Given the findings of this study, it's important to make sure our "in-group" is honest. Should they be dishonest, we may be influenced by their behavior more than we realize.
2. The findings on saliency also suggest actions we might take: Reminding ourselves or other group members of ethical standards can have an effect on our own or on our group's ethical behavior.
3. It is dangerous to assume we're not capable of unethical behavior. All of us are. If we assume we're above such behavior, we may be particularly likely to be naïve about group factors that affect unethical behavior and to deny the unethical nature of our own actions. The point: We'll be better able to resist group pressures toward unethical behavior if we're open and honest with ourselves about the pressures and temptations.

Sources: Based on: F. Gino, S. Ayal, and D. Ariely, "Contagion and Differentiation in Unethical Behavior," *Psychological Science* 20, no. 3 (2009), pp. 393–398; and N. Mazar, O. Amir, and D. Ariely, "The Dishonesty of Honest People: A Theory of Self-Concept Maintenance," *Journal of Marketing Research* 45, no. 6 (2008), pp. 633–644.

Class Exercise

1. Ask students to think about groups they associate with. The groups can be at church, at school, at work, or social groupings. For example, the group could be people the student hangs out with on Friday or Saturday night.
2. Ask the students to remember a decision the group made for a behavior that was later found to be inappropriate. For example, the group that hangs out at the local burger joint on Friday and Saturday night might have seen a professor's car in the parking lot and, after discussion, decided to play a prank such as deflating the car's tires. Everyone in the group thought it would be great to see the professor's face when he came out and saw the flat tires.
3. Ask the students "Why did the group make this decision?" The students will use chapter concepts to answer this question, including the effect of "groupshift," "cohesion," "social norms," and "conformity." This is true in this example as well as in positive group behaviors. Another way to look at it is that the group made some assumption about what is true and made the decision based on the assumption. Review this video:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHUKjn8E02k&feature=related>

4. Ask students to assess if the decisions their groups made were based on fallacies. If so, what was the fallacy? Why is it a fallacy? What could students do to ensure that the fallacy does not cause a bad decision?

Point/CounterPoint

All Jobs Should Be Designed Around Groups

Point

Groups, not individuals, are the ideal building blocks for an organization. There are several reasons for designing all jobs around groups.

First, in general, groups make better decisions than the average individual acting alone.

Second, with the growth in technology, society is becoming more intertwined. Look at the growth of social networking media such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. People are connected anyway, so why not design work in the same way?

Third, small groups are good for people. They can satisfy social needs and provide support for employees in times of stress and crisis. Evidence indicates that social support—both when they provide it and when they receive it—makes people happier and even allows them to live longer.

Fourth, groups are very effective tools for implementation for decisions. Groups gain commitment from their members so that group decisions are likely to be willingly and more successfully carried out.

Fifth, groups can control and discipline individual members in ways that are often extremely difficult through impersonal quasilegal disciplinary systems. Group norms are powerful control devices.

Sixth, groups are a means by which large organizations can fend off many of the negative effects of increased size. Groups help prevent communication lines from growing too long, the hierarchy from growing too steep, and individuals from getting lost in the crowd.

The rapid growth of team-based organizations in recent years suggests that we may well be on our way toward a day when almost all jobs are designed around groups.

CounterPoint

Capitalistic countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom value the individual. Designing jobs around groups is inconsistent with the economic values of these countries. Moreover, as capitalism and entrepreneurship have spread throughout Eastern Europe, Asia, and other more collective societies, we should expect to see less emphasis on groups and more on the individuals in workplaces throughout the world. Let's look at the United States to see how cultural and economic values shape employee attitudes toward groups.

The United States was built on the ethic of the individual. Its culture strongly values individual achievement and encourages competition. Even in team sports, people want to identify individuals for recognition. U.S. adults enjoy being part of a group in which they can maintain a strong individual identity. They don't enjoy sublimating their

identity to that of the group. When they are assigned to groups, all sorts of bad things happen, including conflict, groupthink, social loafing, and deviant behavior.

The U.S. worker likes a clear link between individual effort and a visible outcome. It's not by chance that the United States, as a nation, has a considerably larger proportion of high achievers than exists in most of the rest of the world. It breeds achievers, and achievers seek personal responsibility. They would be frustrated in job situations in which their contribution was commingled and homogenized with the contributions of others.

U.S. workers want to be hired, evaluated, and rewarded on their individual achievements. They are not likely to accept a group's decision on such issues as their job assignments and wage increases, nor are they comfortable in a system in which the sole basis for their promotion or termination is the performance of their group.

Class Exercise

1. Discuss group versus individual grading with students.
2. Begin by polling them as to whether they would prefer a grade for this class (or another specific class) based on their individual effort or on the effort of a five-student group they belonged to. The class mix on this issue will vary.
3. Move the group-based grade students into groups; leave the individual-based grade students. Have them create a list of three to five of the reasons for their preference.
4. After 10–15 minutes, have the group-based students pick a spokesperson and have them record their lists on the board. Once they are recorded, start an “individual” list by asking the individual students, one at a time, for a reason, going round robin until you have all of their responses.
5. Now, as a class, compare and discuss the reasons. How are the lists different? The same? Is there a theme or themes emerging (groups—safety in numbers, it is a hard class; individual—I want control of my grade, etc.).
6. Ask students if they think the reasons that seem to be emerging would:
 - Be acceptable to other students in other classes in your school
 - Be acceptable to other students when it came time to interview for jobs
 - A way to get ahead in their careers (group effort rather than individual effort being rewarded)

Alternate Class Exercise

1. Start as the above with steps one through three, however, instead of having the groups/individuals create a list, give them one to three short papers to grade. It (they) can be one(s) you wrote for this exercise or one from a previous class with identifying marks removed. Each group/individual should all have the same items to grade.
2. Give the assignment instructions and the learning objectives for the paper.
3. If possible, separate the individual graders from the group graders in separate rooms while they perform the task. Ask them to record their start and end times on the assignment. Tell them that when they have completed the task, to wait where they are until you call them back into the room.
4. For the debrief, post your version of the graded assignment so students can compare their work with yours.
5. Discuss the issues of group decision making as applied to their task. Where were they effective or not? What were the problems?
6. Ask if they would prefer this to what typically happens in the college classroom in terms of grading. Why or why not?