Chapter 07 - Group and intergroup behaviour

Answers to end of chapter questions

1. In what, if any, ways are groups more effective than an equivalent number of individuals?

There is evidence to suggest that groups can be effective; however, there is also evidence to suggest that they are not always successful. Team working has had conferred on it an almost mythical status as a panacea for motivational and performance problems. One important function of this chapter will, therefore, be to examine more critically the claims for the benefits of team working. In the psychological literature going back over a century it has been clear that groups often do not perform as well as the same number of individuals working alone.

2. Why do groups form?

Some writers stress the functional reasons for the existence of groups, such as joint action on a task; face-to-face interaction or mutually dependent relationships. Other writers have emphasized the psychological processes which cause groups to form.

One candidate psychological process is need fulfilment. Sheldon and Bettencourt (2002), for example, found groups fulfilled both affiliative needs (the need to be included and the need for relatedness (closeness) and interestingly other, more self-oriented needs (the needs for autonomy and personal distinctiveness).

3. To what extent is ‘cohesiveness’ in groups a ‘good thing’?

Cohesiveness can be defined as the complex of forces giving rise to the perceptions by members of a group identity. Positive identification with a cohesive group enhances an individual’s self-concept and self-esteem, while supportive interpersonal relationships reduce anxiety and satisfy a range of ego needs. These benefits do not, however, always occur. Inexperienced psychotherapists may, for example, not be able to prevent one member’s self-esteem being damaged if they are victimized by other members of the group. However, most therapists feel the benefits of using cohesive groups outweigh the potential disadvantages.

4. What groups do you belong to—of these which has more impact on your attitudes and behaviour—and why?

There is no suggested answer to this question as it is based on student experience.
5. In what ways do groups behave differently to individuals?

One notable disadvantage of groups that are highly cohesive but not reflexive is that their decision-making ability can be drastically reduced by what Janis (1972) termed groupthink. He defined this as a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgement that results from in-group pressures. In other words, the pressures of conformity that can arise in highly cohesive groups reduce reflexivity, clouding members’ judgement and their ability to reach a correct decision.

6. ‘Money spent on team building is not necessarily money well spent’—discuss.

It is argued that there are advantages and disadvantages of team work, however, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

7. What is the contribution of Belbin’s model of team roles?

Belbin’s model has taken on a life of its own and an influence out of all proportion to its empirical support. Its main benefit—the main ‘payoff’ for trainers and consultants using it, is as a heuristic—as a way of thinking and talking about team and individual effectiveness. It provides team members with ‘permission to talk’; in other words, a neutral, non-evaluative framework for discussing their own and other people’s contributions to the group. In doing so, the assumption is the model helps resolve performance and relationship issues which are becoming a barrier to effectiveness.

8. Why were the Hawthorne studies so important?

The demand for scientific research into the effects of these factors led to the founding of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology in Britain and the Psychological Corporation in America. This is now recognized as a turning point in the development of psychology applied in the workplace and it continues to exert an influence on management theory and practice some eighty years later. Through experimentation, it was gradually realized was that none of the variables which were commonly associated with increases in productivity could explain their findings. What had come into existence in the relay assembly test room was a social system.

9. What causes conflict between groups and to what extent can the possibility of conflict in work teams be minimized?

Two main explanations of intergroup conflict have emerged, and they reflect the two different bases of group formation. Functional theorists believe that if groups have a functional basis, group conflict must be the result of a group perceiving another group as a threat or a potential threat to its goal attainment. The second explanation is known as social identity theory, which assumes groups form through the perception of a shared social identity (Tajfel, 1978; Turner 1991; Brewer and Miller, 1996). The need for a positive social identity also means that ingroup members are likely to
perceive larger differences between themselves and outgroup members than actually exist (e.g. Lalonde 2002). In addition, there is likely to be what is termed *ingroup favouritism*: ingroup members tending to favour each other over outgroup members. This can get to the point where it is unjustified and unreasonable and becomes *ingroup bias*.