



Unit IV

The nature of group dynamics cyberspace social psychology of online groups
developmental stages of mailing lists - making virtual communities work -
unique groups in cyberspace - decision making methods for e-mail groups -
changes in group boundaries and dynamics.

The nature of group dynamics

- Group dynamics deals with the attitudes and behavioral patterns of a group. Group dynamics concern how groups are formed, what is their structure and which processes are followed in their functioning. Thus, it is concerned with the interactions and forces operating between groups.
- Group dynamics is relevant to groups of all kinds – both formal and informal. If the UPA government has set up Group of Ministers for every governance issue, the Supreme Court of India has 27 Group of Judges committees overseeing all manner of non-judicial work in the apex court. In an organizational setting, the term groups are a very common and the study of groups and group dynamics is an important area of study.
- People may underestimate the importance of society and group memberships on their lives. Whilst people sometimes undertake solo journeys yet by and large much of our experiences of life involves being engaged with others and groups.

Social psychology of online groups

- Groups ranging in size from a few people to thousands and millions within a "community" are forming within cyberspace.
- Many of the classic social-psychological principles of group dynamics can be applied in understanding and improving the functioning of these groups - such as issues concerning leadership, communication patterns, group boundaries, cohesion, alliances and subgroupings.
- However, given the special psychological features of cyberspace, online groups also can be quite different than in-person groups.
- Text-only communications, equalization of status, and the opportunity for altering or hiding one's identity are all unique monkey wrenches tossed into the online group process.

Cyberspace social psychology of online groups

- The stretching of temporal boundaries also makes Usenet Newsgroups and mailing lists rather unique not only as compared to in-person groups, but in relation to online chat sessions as well.
- New social-psychological principles may be needed to account for these varied and unusual group dynamics in cyberspace.
- Designing and improving online communities will require a synergistic blend of traditional and innovative psychological theory.
- Also, perhaps for the first time in history, social psychology will need to merge with computer technology and know-how.

Developmental Stages Of Mailing Lists

Every list seems to go through the same cycle:

- 1. Initial enthusiasm** (people introduce themselves, and gush a lot about how wonderful it is to find kindred souls).
- 2. Evangelism** (people moan about how few folks are posting to the list, and brainstorm recruitment strategies).
- 3. Growth** (more and more people join, more and more lengthy threads develop, occasional off-topic threads pop up).
- 4. Community** (lots of threads, some more relevant than others; lots of information and advice is exchanged; experts help other experts as well as less experienced colleagues; friendships develop; people tease each other; newcomers are welcomed with generosity and patience; everyone -- newbie and expert alike -- feels comfortable asking questions, suggesting answers, and sharing opinions).
- 5. Discomfort with diversity** (the number of messages increases dramatically; not every thread is fascinating to every reader; people start complaining about the signal-to-noise ratio; person 1 threatens to quit if *other* people don't limit discussion to person 1's pet topic; person 2 agrees with person 1; person 3 tells 1 & 2 to lighten up; more bandwidth is wasted complaining about off-topic threads than is used for the threads themselves; everyone gets annoyed).

Developmental Stages Of Mailing Lists

- **6a. Smug complacency and stagnation** (the purists flame everyone who asks an 'old' question or responds with humor to a serious post; newbies are rebuffed; traffic drops to a doze-producing level of a few minor issues; all interesting discussions happen by private email and are limited to a few participants; the purists spend lots of time self-righteously congratulating each other on keeping off-topic threads off the list).
- **OR**
- **6b. Maturity** (a few people quit in a huff; the rest of the participants stay near stage 4, with stage 5 popping up briefly every few weeks; many people wear out their second or third 'delete' key, but the list lives contentedly ever after).

Making Virtual Communities Work

"Nine Principles for Making Virtual Communities Work" are

- ✓ Use software that promotes good discussions
- ✓ Don't impose a length limitation on postings
- ✓ Front-load your system with talkative, diverse people
- ✓ Let the users resolve their own disputes
- ✓ Provide institutional memory
- ✓ Promote continuity
- ✓ Be host to a particular interest group
- ✓ Provide places for children
- ✓ Confront the users with a crisis

Making Virtual Communities Work

Godwin's suggestions seem to focus on the use of newsgroup style postings as a means to communicate, rather than chat areas or mailing lists. Some of his ideas do apply to real-time online discussion groups. However, other principles could be suggested that pertain specifically to chat groups and mailing lists. For example, some guidelines for chat groups might include:

- make it easy to locate other users when they are online
- make it easy to locate groups that are in progress
- provide the option for users to save discussions
- provide the option for private messages among users in a group, and consider the pros and cons of enabling users to know that others are communicating privately - as, during in-person meetings, when people whisper to each other

Making Virtual Communities Work

- provide public meeting areas as well as private rooms that users can create themselves and perhaps even "lock" the door to prevent uninvited intrusions (what, in group dynamics terms, amounts to maintaining group "boundaries")
- - encourage continuity through ongoing (weekly, or even daily) groups - including both topical discussion groups and especially groups devoted to self-help, personal support, and discussions concerning the welfare and development of the online community
- - encourage the forming of new ongoing groups and the communication among different groups, especially communication among the founders or "facilitators" of the groups
- don't try to over-control the community with too many regulations or imposed structures. Give it some space to develop spontaneously into what it needs to be

Making Virtual Communities Work

Drawing on her own experience as well as interviews with several pioneers in building online worlds, Amy Jo Kim (www.naima.com) concluded that there are nine basic principles for creating a community:

- 1. Define the purpose of the community
- 2. Create distinct gathering places
- 3. Create member profiles that evolve over time
- 4. Promote effective leadership
- 5. Define a clear-yet-flexible code of conduct
- 6. Organize and promote cyclic events
- 7. Provide a range of roles that couple power with responsibility
- 8. Facilitate member-created subgroups
- **9. Integrate the online environment with the "real" world**

Unique Groups in cyberspace

- The ability to access and filter through numerous potential relationships, as well as the stretching of spatial boundaries, has resulted in unique groups forming online that may never have existed in-person.
- The needs addressed by these online groups may be needs that traditional in-person organizations and institutions have been unable to address.
- Such groups may be a gold mine for social-psychological research. While some of these groups are potentially beneficial and healthy (self-help groups, special interest consumer and hobbyist groups, etc.), the value of others is questionable and in some cases obviously pathological (e.g., pedophile groups).
- Nevertheless, even these pathological groups can be a source of valuable information for researchers who are attempting to understand and remedy important psychological and social problems.
- The various unique groups forming in cyberspace are a crystallization of the various hidden facets of the larger, in-person culture.

Decision Making Methods For E-mail Groups

- Sometimes in the course of an e-mail list, the group needs to make a decision about some issue at hand.
- In a "working" list - where the group's explicit purpose is to carry out a task - this may happen on a regular basis.
- As many of us know, group decisions can be a very complex, emotional, and frustrating process. This may be especially true on e-mail lists, where discussions can be a bit confusing.
- The lack of face-to-face cues may make it more difficult to understand other people's meanings and intentions.
- Messages on a list also tend to be scrambled in sequence, so that several threads of conversations become intertwined and crisscrossed. Add this to the fact the people are coming from different time zones, and the list becomes a bit of a temporal jumble.
- In this article, I'd like to propose a simple discussion/voting method that can help structure the decision-making process.
- This method assumes that decisions on the list are democratic. The process consists of 5 stages, with stages 2 through 4 having a specific, predetermined length. The role of "facilitator" for all decision-making may be a permanent position (the list owner or some other list member), or may alternate among members. The facilitator guides the group through the 5 stages and reports the

Decision Making Methods For E-mail Groups

1. Setting the Process into Motion

- The first step is to decide when a question or issue is important enough to set the wheels of the decision-making process into motion.
- In many cases it will be obvious because list members already have introduced and informally discussed the issue. At least several members of the list must agree to begin the Formal Discussion of the issue. One option is to begin the Formal Discussion after this possibility has been motioned and seconded. Another option is a simple "show of hands."
- If there is sufficient interest in beginning the decision-making, the facilitator sends a "Decision Agenda Message" (DAM) to the list announcing that the process has begun.
- This message: (a) indicates that the Formal Discussion period has begun; (b) clearly states the issue being discussed (the issue should be expressed in the form of a yes/no question); (c) outlines the specific length and deadline (date and time) for each of the stages; (d) encourages the list members to avoid distracting the group by starting other discussion threads.

Decision Making Methods For E-mail Groups

2. Formal Discussion

- For a specific period of time as specified in the DAM, the list discusses the issue.
- The length of this period may vary according to the needs of the list and the particular issue at hand. Probably at least 2-3 days is necessary, in order to allow people in different time zones to participate.
- To avoid distractions, other discussion threads should be kept to a minimum. All members of the list should be encouraged to participate.
- It's very possible that the discussion may result in a change in the wording of the question. If there is general agreement about this change, the facilitator resends the DAM with the new wording of the issue.
- If there is general agreement, the time-frame for the decision-making stages may be altered in this resend of the DAM.
- During the Formal Discussion Stage, the facilitator may send one or two messages to the list reminding the group of the date/time for the end of the discussion and the beginning of voting. If the discussion fades out quickly, the facilitator may ask the group if anyone objects to proceeding immediately to the Voting Stage. If there are no objections, the facilitator sends a message to the list indicating that the Voting Stage has begun.

Decision Making Methods For E-mail Groups

3. Voting

- At the established date and time according to the DAM, the facilitator sends a message to the wizard list indicating that the formal discussion has ended and voting can begin. This message reiterates the date and time that all votes must be in.
- No votes are accepted after the deadline and no further discussions should occur during this voting stage.
- The facilitator tallies the votes and sends a Voting Tally Message (VTM) to list indicating the results.
- Another list member may volunteer to confirm to count. The final decision may be based upon a simple or 2/3 majority vote, or on a consensus.
- Which of these three options is used should be determined before the decision-making begins. If consensus is the preferred choice, but a consensus is not attained after the votes are in, the facilitator sends a second DAM indicating that the group is returning to the Formal Discussion Stage. The group repeats the process until a consensus is reached.

Decision Making Methods For E-mail Groups

4. Appeal

- In the VTM, the facilitator also asks the group if there is anyone who calls for an appeal. In this Appeal Stage, the group discusses whether there were any violations of the decision-making process or unusual circumstances that may have disrupted the process.
- If no one calls for an appeal, the process moves to Stage 5. If someone does call for an appeal, the appeal discussion lasts for a predetermined period of time (2-3 days).
- The facilitator announces the end of the Appeal Stage and calls for a vote (simple or 2/3 majority decision) on whether the decision-making process should be restarted at Stage 2.
- If the discussion fades out before the predetermined deadline, the facilitator asks whether anyone objects to proceeding immediately to the vote.

Decision Making Methods For E-mail Groups

5. Implementation and Evaluation

- Once the decision has been reached, the group puts it into action. At some later point, when the effects of the implemented decision can be evaluated, the group should discuss how well the decision worked.

○

Keeping Records

- Efficiently making decisions can build a sense of efficacy, purpose, and cohesion within the group. Keeping records of the decision-making sessions offers additional benefits. The VTMs can reveal who are the active members of the group and who are not, as well as the history of each member's positions on important issues. The sequence of issues in the DTMs also provides a valuable outline of the history of the group.

Changes In Group Boundaries And Dynamics

Functions....

Defining boundaries

- ☐ To identify who are members of a group, some sort of devices must be used to mark the boundaries.

Choosing Leaders

- ☐ Groups by nature must resolve the issue of leadership.
- ☐ A leader according to Tischler is someone who occupies central role or position of dominance and influence in a group.

➤ ***INSTRUMENTAL LEADERSHIP***

➤ ***EXPRESSIVE LEADERSHIP***

The focus is on the boundaries of groups. This is a very complex dynamic and the boundaries of task, time, territory, identity and authority are explained in a simple and possible way. Time is also spent on explaining the theory of under- and over-bounded systems.

When studying the dynamics of boundaries one will have to look at three boundary concepts, namely; intra-personal, inter-personal and inter-group boundaries.

INTRA-PERSONAL BOUNDARIES:

These are the boundaries that every person has within him/herself. If one just think of the different roles that one individual has to play you can already conceptualise the complex boundary regulation and management that an

individual has to constantly maintain. Many psychological disorders like schizophrenia are a sign of an individual not having the ability to regulate his/her intra-personal boundaries.

INTER-PERSONAL BOUNDARIES:

The average person has ± 20 interactions with other people during one day. These interactions differ in nature relative to the people you interact with. You will probably (or should I say hopefully) kiss your spouse goodbye in the morning, greet a friend with the hand, say hi to colleagues at work and only look at people in the lift.

The way that you manage your interpersonal boundaries thus differ in relation to the people you interact with. Personal safety probably plays a big role in the establishment of inter-personal boundaries. Just think of how differently you manage your interpersonal boundaries with different people. With some people you spend only 5-minutes and with others you are prepared to give hours; to some you will only talk about 'safe' issues and with others you share your deepest emotions.

The importance of understanding these boundaries is that it takes up a large part of your life

having the ability to regulate his/her intra-personal boundaries.

INTER-PERSONAL BOUNDARIES:

The average person has ± 20 interactions with other people during one day. These interactions differ in nature relative to the people you interact with. You will probably (or should I say hopefully) kiss your spouse goodbye in the morning, greet a friend with the hand, say hi to colleagues at work and only look at people in the lift.

The way that you manage your interpersonal boundaries thus differ in relation to the people you interact with. Personal safety probably plays a big role in the establishment of inter-personal boundaries. Just think of how differently you manage your interpersonal boundaries with different people. With some people you spend only 5-minutes and with others you are prepared to give hours; to some you will only talk about 'safe' issues and with others you share your deepest emotions.

The importance of understanding these boundaries is that it takes up a large part of your life.

INTER-GROUP BOUNDARIES:

As individuals manage their boundaries with interactions with each other, groups also manage theirs. Think of how cultures stick to their identities, and how much time countries spend on boundary regulation with other countries. The Gulf-war is also a good example of how fiercely boundary violations are sanctioned. On smaller scale think of how many times different departments have to interact with each other. This interaction inevitably calls for constant boundary regulation and also the continuous tolerance of boundary violations. The management of inter-group boundaries is definitely one of the big challenges that a middle manager of the SAPS faces. This is especially true if one looks at the large SAPS bureaucracy with its hundreds of faces. This is especially true if one looks at the large SAPS bureaucracy with its hundreds of departments that collectively has to achieve one goal.

THE BOUNDARIES OF TASK, TIME AND TERRITORY:

In his book 'Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' Steven Covey discusses the ability of people to operate within their circle of influence. This ability is without doubt related to one's ability to manage the boundaries of time, task and space. Short notes on these boundaries are given below:

THE TASK BOUNDARY:

The task of a group or individual should not be confused with the 'task vs. people' concept which is often used in HR fields of study. Task in this context refers to any specific outcome with which a person or group is focussing on during any given point. Once a group or individual starts losing focus on the task at hand and starts spending time on basic assumptions, we can say that the task boundary has been violated.

THE TIME BOUNDARY:

Under these assumptions, we can say that the task boundary has been violated.

THE TIME BOUNDARY:

It is a well-known fact that effective people do not work all the time, but rather effectively within time boundaries. Groups and individuals that cannot manage time boundaries effectively will tend to struggle to be effective with their task. Such people or individuals will also find that their boundaries are often violated.

THE TERRITORY BOUNDARY:

The term territory can refer to many things. For one it can refer to the physical place where a specific task takes place. It could also refer to the psychological place where a specific task takes place. Psychologically, the here-and-now is the only place where tasks can be completed effectively. This is so because the here-and-now is the only territory that the group has any influence over.

The background features a light gray base with large, soft-edged organic shapes in muted red and olive green. A thin white line outlines a shape on the right. In the top left, there is a faint, stylized illustration of a leafy branch.

thank you