



# EGT: Group and Team Dynamics

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## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To understand the difference between Group Coaching and Team Coaching
- To know and be able to assess group dynamic issues
- To develop insights into effective management of groups and the individuals within those groups to ensure the goals of the coaching or workshop are met

## ICF COMPETENCIES

### B. Co-creating the Relationship

#### 4. Cultivates Trust and Safety

*Definition: Partners with the client to create a safe, supportive environment that allows the client to share freely. Maintains a relationship of mutual respect and trust.*

- Seeks to understand the client within their context which may include their identity, environment, experiences, values and beliefs
- Demonstrates respect for the client's identity, perceptions, style and language and adapts one's coaching to the client
- Acknowledges and respects the client's unique talents, insights and work in the coaching process
- Shows support, empathy and concern for the client
- Acknowledges and supports the client's expression of feelings, perceptions, concerns, beliefs and suggestions
- Demonstrates openness and transparency as a way to display vulnerability and build trust with the client

## GROUP COACHING AND TEAM DYNAMICS

Group dynamics are an unavoidable consequence of 2 or more human beings coming together in some way. There is one individual with their personal qualities such as biases, beliefs, challenges, strengths etc and there is another individual coming with their own. Together, there is a 3rd force - the space between them. This space is a living, breathing and ever changing entity - it is **dynamic** if you will. The effective group coach needs to understand, prepare for and manage this space.

Group Coaching and Team Coaching are often terms that are used interchangeably because they both involve bringing 2 or more people together on a regular basis to work with a coach who supports them to move towards a goal. There are some clear differences between groups and teams that have an impact on the dynamics of the group. In short - while all teams are groups, not all groups are teams.

With Group coaching, the people attending the group may or may not have a relationship outside of the group. While the group will have some common theme that attracts the participants to attend, it is quite possible that each member of the group has a different motivation and expectation. The members of a group might also come from all different backgrounds and these differences exert an influence on how the group functions and the skills required by the coach to manage it effectively.

Conversely, Teams are defined as a group of people who have some kind of pre-existing relationship, whether it is that they work for the same company, are members of the same club, or play the same sport together. Team coaching generally involves the entire team working towards achieving a single outcome. Because of this commonality, Teams often come with a shared perspective that can be leveraged by the coach as they are working with the team.

Regardless of these differences though, there will always be group dynamics at play and for the purposes of this module we will refer to both using the overarching term "groups". Group dynamics can be understood as the way in which the group members' distinct roles, personalities, and behaviours impact other members and the group as a whole.

## Qualities of group dynamics

Group dynamics are neither a positive nor negative thing - they are the space(s) in between the various members of the group. Ideally, a group functions best when the dynamics are positive, generative, supportive and focussed. You will know when your group has a generally positive dynamic when you see:

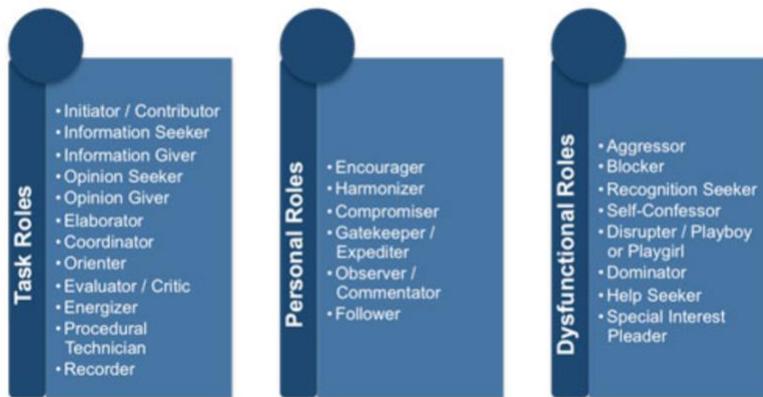
- a cohesive approach to working together
- members appreciate one another's unique experiences, talents, ideas
- members ask each other for input and offer ideas of their own
- the meetings are engaging and members leave feeling inspired
- members are succeeding on their goals and action steps and are willing to share their missteps and mistakes
- high levels of commitment, accountability and motivation towards shared activities.

While a poor group dynamic may be subtle to identify, there are some signs and symptoms that a group coach can watch for that might suggest there is a problem with the group's dynamic.

- formerly participative members stop sharing or even speaking within the group
- one or two members dominate the group
- ground rules such as "no side conversations" or "no advice giving" are ignored
- communication styles change - perhaps you're hearing sarcasm, dismissal or invalidating remarks from members
- members stop making progress towards their goals
- members stop coming to the group altogether.

It can be disheartening to see these things happen within your group. Because group dynamics are about individuals and the impact of their behaviours in the group, you might find it helpful to understand some typical group member roles that show up in all groups. Knowing these personalities are there can help you identify potential problems and stop them before they start.

Way back in 1948 when Kurt Lewin was doing seminal work on change theory, [Kenneth Bennes](#) and [Paul Sheats](#) were working on identifying the roles individuals assume when they join a group:



These roles can be in harmony with one another or they can be in conflict. Recognizing what roles might be at play when you first notice a negative shift in dynamics can help you decide how to manage the challenge.

## COACHING APPLICATION

**Steps you can take to prep the group for positive dynamics:**

### **Picking the right members of the group:**

Having the right mix of people in the group is important. The coach should become like a lawyer, picking members of the jury that will have his client's best interest in mind. Everyone will not thrive in the group coaching environment. It will take discernment on the part of the coach.

The profile of a good group coaching member:

- Emotionally mature
- Empathic and compassionate
- Motivated to get the most out of the group coaching
- Individuals that are clear about what they want
- People who like groups exchange and multiple viewpoints

- Coachees who thrive in group environments, learn better and are more comfortable
- People who prefer a slow and steady pace - Group coaching gives them that time and space
- People who are highly self-discipline and hold themselves accountable

**Invest some time in team building exercises:**

It can be tempting to dive head first into the work that needs to be done but investing some time on activities to warm up the space and allow the members to get to know each other a bit is valuable time indeed. There are lots of ways to spend 5 minutes on these activities - the internet is your friend here or check out the link in the resources for ideas.

**Set clear Boundaries for the Group and create a Group Contract:**

Ensure that you have done your work in communicating the expectations for each member's participation in the group. Assuming that everyone knows what "not interrupting" or "not giving advice" or "being supportive" means is a recipe for disaster. Clear expectations communicated effectively give you a solid footing. Investing time to engage the group in the creation of this contract is even better.

**Define and Communicate the Roles required in the group:**

Tapping into the natural roles that members will want to fill and structuring their role to fulfill that need can satisfy them. Someone who naturally wants to be a recorder will be happy if they are the ones chosen to write the notes or use the zoom whiteboard feature to record ideas.

**Be the Leader the Group needs:**

Failing to lead effectively allows dysfunctional role players to take over and disrupt. Know your own role, what's expected from you as the group coach, and take responsibility for fulfilling that role.

**What to do When Problems with Dynamics Arise:**

**Pay Attention:**

The expression "nip things in the bud" is useful here. You can't address problems as they arise if you don't notice them. Knowing where your group is in the [Tuckman's Model](#) for Group Development can help you but don't dismiss your gut instinct. Is someone consistently arriving

late and disrupting others while regaling them with stories of challenging computer issues? This may turn into a bigger problem. Don't let that bud bloom into a giant, thorny problem before you address it.

### **Address Problems Quickly:**

It takes confidence to be direct with those who are creating challenges within your group but it is critical that you do so. Choose an appropriate moment which respects both the group integrity and your need to 'fix' the problem. Use your coaching skills to approach the people who are disruptive in a creative, open, curious way. Remind them of the rules of the group and let them know what impact their behaviour is having on the group. Mediate between those who might be in conflict. As part of setting expectations you should have consequences - don't be afraid to apply them to serve the sanctity of your group.

Every group has dynamics - the larger the group, the more dynamic that space in between will be. Taking proactive steps to build space in your group for a positive dynamic will go a long way to ensuring your group is a success. Paying attention to the group as it develops and being prepared to address challenges as they arise will keep you on the right track.

## **RESOURCES**

- [Article] [Improving Group Dynamics](#)  
By The Mind Tools Content Team
- [Multimedia] [The Dynamics of Team Coaching](#)  
By Centre for Creative Leadership
- [Article] [6 Strategies for Managing and Improving Team Dynamics](#)  
By DeaconCo, 2017
- [Article] [Benne and Sheats' Group Roles Identifying Both Positive and Negative Group Behavior Roles](#)  
By The Mind Tools Content Team
- [Article] [5 Minute Ice Breakers](#)  
By Lori Li for TINYpulse, 2020
- [Humour] [Group Dynamics](#)  
By IBSA, 2012