

# Diversity in Group Behaviour and How to Handle it

## 1. THE POSITIVE TYPE

A great help in discussion.

- Let their contributions add up.
- Use them frequently (but don't overuse).

Team them up with quiet/shy person in small groups.

## 2. THE LOQUACIOUS TYPE

This is seeking approval through over talking someone who tries to dominate the discussion and seek attention. Simply being unable to facilitate self—disclosure, or being "intellectual" in order to impress other group members.

Limit their speaking time.

- Involve other group members in helping the rambler avoid turning the group off. They can be interrupted at an appropriate spot with a comment like:  
"You've got an interesting point there,  
What do other people think about it?"
- Take them aside before the next meeting and ask them if they will observe and record what happens in the next session; tell them they will have X minutes to report their observations to the group.

## 3. The PERSISTENT Questioner/THE ARGUMENTATIVE TYPE

Tries to trap the group leader. Can be negative and attempt to divide the group.

Stay quiet.

Don't get involved in an argument.

- Stop them monopolising  
Try to avoid a 'me/them situation', i.e. don't allow them to cause factions.
- Pass their questions back to the group.  
Point out to member that worthwhile results will not be achieved unless positive and helpful contributions are made by all present.

## 4. THE "SIDE-TALKER" TYPE

Converses with neighbours in low tones on the subject being discussed. Maybe waiting for someone to ask him / her a question.

- Look directly at the offender and say "you seem to have an opinion X can we share it?"
- Fire a related question at the talker.
- If too frequent: — stop discussion — restate purpose of meeting.

## **5. THE SHY OR INARTICULATE TYPE**

They should not be put on the spot or singled out to make a statement ("How do you feel about that Joe?") But should be encouraged to contribute.

- The first word is the hardest, and the longer the silence the more difficult it is to break it. Ask easy questions, increase their self—confidence. Give credit when possible.
- When getting group reactions go around one at a time in sitting order so that each person is expected to say something.
- A group discussion of the difficulties people face in speaking in front of others could be helpful.  
Also a discussion of the different reasons for silence, eg, boredom, shyness, alienation.

## **6. THE APPROVAL SEEKING TYPE**

Some individuals are intimidated by authority figures, or have such a poor sense of self—worth that they are always going outside their own resources for support.

Approval-seeking may take the form of students looking directly at the leader both before and after speaking to assess if they have the leader's agreement. The leader then:

Deliberately looks elsewhere. If the behaviour persists identifying it to the individuals is most appropriate.

Approval-seeking may also take the form of asking for group consensus or for agreement from individuals.

In either case the leader offers the approval—seeker the opportunity to work to eliminate this essentially non—productive behaviour.

## **7. THE "I'VE ALWAYS BEEN THAT WAY" TYPE**

Believing that one's past necessitates one's future is fallacious thinking which encourages people to function at lower levels than what they could attain. The self—defining I'ms ("I'm shy, I'm lazy, I'm bad at math's") are really choices, and self—fulfilling prophecies.

Appropriate interventions include: "Do you really believe that every—one has certain areas of their life over which they have no control" or "Do you feel that because you've always been ineffective you are destined to stay that way?".

## **8. THE Highbrow Type**

1. A participant says something like "We think we ought to ..."

This is a ploy to muster support for a position or point of view, or a means of making the speaker more comfortable.

An appropriate intervention might be:

"You mentioned we several times. Are you speaking for every person in the group? .... What do

think about it?

2. Another participant may say "The group is getting bogged down . . ."

• This participant is intellectualising and an appropriate intervention here might be "Well you are a member of the group, that do you suggest we do about it?"

"Do the other group members agree?"

- criticise them. Use the "yes—but" technique.

### **9. THE KNOW-IT-ALL TYPE**

1. Some people are not prepared to change their opinions and ideas because they think they "know—it—all". This may have a dampening effect on the group.

2. Others set themselves up as 'experts' and try to answer all the Questions.

- Let the group deal with their theories
- Encourage group members to elaborate on possible alternatives
- Keep interrupting the 'expert' to prevent them monopolising the session
- Indicate to know—it—all' what he or she is doing
- Point out the effect the member is having on the group — and have this confirmed by group members.

3. Others constantly prolong the discussion by raising irrelevant points

- Ask the group if they feel that the topic is finished by that stage and move on — ie, democratic reaction.

### **10. THE COMPLAINER**

1. Inclusion as an opportunity to air personal complaints:

- Invite member to air personal grievances privately Insist on no personal criticisms of persons present.

2. The student who suggests that his or her problems are due to someone else

Blaming others can be countered by such interventions as "Who is really in charge of you?" and "Why should someone else change for you?"

### **11. THE CLOWNING TYPE**

Usually someone who is insecure and, or afraid to express their real feelings, and resorts to "clowning about" to hide these feelings. Or they may not yet be ready to seriously consider the choice of a career.

- Try to find out the reason why they are "clowning" — if possible outside the group.
- Point out that the programme is for their benefit
- Ask the group what they think about the behaviour, ask them to deal with it.

### **12. THE NON-PARTICIPATOR TYPE**

Someone who does not readily contribute to the group activities. May be shy or inarticulate or may be participating but just not speaking much. Alternatively, the non-participator may be pre-occupied with other thoughts, or just plain bored.

- Ask at the end of the session if they are happy with the situation (some are quite content to say very little, but some would like to join in).
- If boredom is the case discuss they are bored. Try to raise their motivation and involvement. If necessary establish their original reasons for wanting to participate in the programme and see whether their expectations are too high or too low.

### **13. THE LATE-COMER TYPE**

1. Someone who persistently arrives late at the group meetings without good reason.
  - try to ignore their arrival, but be aware that this person might become a side-talker.
2. If someone often arrives late, but expresses a strong desire to attend the meetings:
  - Give a brief summary of what has happened, or, better still, get one of the other participants to summarise.
  - Make each opening activity so interesting that late-comers won't want to miss out talk to the offender outside the group.

## **OTHER SITUATIONS WHICH MAY ARISE IN THE GROUP ARE:**

### **LACK OF INTEREST:/WHY**

- Lack of interest and enthusiasm by group leader
  - Ideas not being implemented
  - Lack of preparation and understanding of programme by leader
  - Resentment to some authority shown by group members.
  - Introduce related theme — after ensuring debate bring back to topic
- Go back to Notes and handouts for a better understanding of the programme, prepare each session well in advance.
- Discuss purpose of programme with members, ask them what is going wrong.
  - Use some other aids such as a film to vary sessions.

### **DISCUSSION OUT OF CONTROL**

Particular aspect being debated can be left for the time being and another line of discussion can be considered.

- Ask a general question.
- Use of aids: Blackboard for summary.
- Call for order — with intention for progress.
- Short break.

### **SCAPEGOATING**

Scapegoating occurs when one person becomes alienated from the group and is the focus of group resentment and hostility. The person is attributed with extreme negative group attitudes which the person may not necessarily express.

• The group's attention should be drawn to what is happening and the group asked the following questions:

- (a) Has the person in fact expressed the attitudes or feelings attributed to him/her?
- (b) What is the group doing to this student?
- (c) How do others in the group feel towards him?
- (d) How is the person feeling

• Try to get the person who is being scapegoated involved with the group by asking for examples of his/her interests or hobbies.

### **EMOTIONAL OUTBURTS**

(a) When the person leaves the group immediately afterwards

The leader is torn between following the person out and staying with the group. Resolution must depend on the circumstances. It should be part of the group contract under what conditions the member may re—enter the group after such an action.

If the leader remains with the group the leader could ask the group how they are feeling about:

- 1 The person
- 2 The material that brought on the outburst
- 3 The person's departure

(b) When the person stays with the group

- 1 Explore the person's feelings.
- 2 Ask the other group members to contribute how they are feeling and how they now see the other person.

N.B. In all cases the outburst should be dealt with, not ignored. It should be made clear that it is not wrong to express emotion.

### **AN Individual SPEAKS FOR ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL IN THE GROUP**

This occurs when:

(a) The person speaking feels the member who is being 'spoken for' is inadequate or incapable — an incompetent communicator.

(b) The person speaking is worried about where the interaction is leading and wants to avoid it.

Appropriate interventions include:

(a) "Did X state how you were feeling more clearly than you were able to? If focus on the goal for

speaking more clearly. If 'No' ... 'How did it feel to have someone else rescue you?'"

(b) To the Speaker:

"Did you feel that Y needed your aid at that moment?" or "Do you find it difficult to hold back when you think you know how someone feels and that person can't express himself?"

An offshoot of this is the "third person syndrome. Where group members will talk about each other to or through a third person. This usually requires very brief intervention like: "You're speaking to me about Z and Z is sitting right here".