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Working With Groups



A leader who doesn't know how to create and manage the organizational culture will be enslaved by it rather than be its architect.

— Rod Hess

■ MASTERING THE SCIENCE OF GROUP PROCESS ■

You have gained a foundation for understanding how normative behavior evolves within groups and the organization, and you have learned a system for identifying normative behavior. Now that you have attracted many followers on your path, you must organize this group into an effective team. This is where knowledge of groups and group dynamics is extremely valuable to you as a leader. This is where you must be able to facilitate their development through the various phases of a group's development. Theoretically, groups can evolve through three phases.

In the *control phase*, you must establish the behavioral boundaries for the group. You will also define and monitor behaviors that you deem acceptable or unacceptable. This enables you to gain control of the group so that the desired *culture* can begin to evolve. You will model and reinforce the behaviors associated with the behavioral characteristics you want the group members to

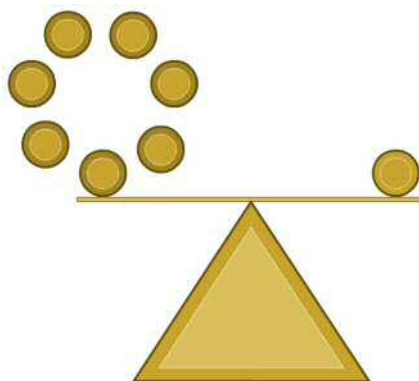
model. *They will learn not so much from what you say, but more so, from what you do.* In this phase, establishing the group norms is the top priority. The focus is out of balance to the group side until you feel the group norms have been set and are somewhat stabilized.

In this phase, three simple sociological tools, *The Force Field*, *Polsky Diamond* and the *Normative Strategies for Change* will be of great value to you. You will *read* the individual behavior of your followers according to these models and be able to gain a better sense of the overall normative health of your group. Understanding group dynamics, but more importantly, knowing how to facilitate the followers through this critical phase, is an invaluable skill for a leader. Once you feel this has been accomplished, you can then facilitate moving the group to the next phase.

In the *relationship phase*, the *normative* boundaries have been established, and the trust level has begun to build, but the group members are still somewhat cautious. The group members understand the processes involved in becoming a group, they use the jargon associated with the group, but haven't really internalized the true philosophy of Helpathy. They continue to work hard at promoting your vision. However, you must vigilantly observe the many group dynamics that occur as your followers vie for their roles within the group. Power plays for status, cliques, personal agendas, ego needs, and other interpersonal dynamics, will eventually give rise to conflict. These dynamics are a necessary part of forming a group or a team and must be attended to as they evolve. However, you must be careful not to spend too much time on these issues for it will divert time and energy away from the focus of attaining the vision. During this phase, you and your followers, need to be able to honestly examine the group's normative culture and employ measures to take the needed steps to *supportively challenge* what is really happening in the group in order to regain the collective focus on the vision.

A leader must remember that conflict is a natural dynamic within a group. The group norms, modeled by the leader, will determine how conflict will affect the group. It can lay the seeds for building open and honest lines of communication based on trust. Or, it can infect the group with a culture of self-preservation based on deceit and mistrust.

In the *cohesive phase*, your group has become a *team*. Team members have a true understanding of one another. Conflict has been minimized. However, conflict situations that do arise are resolved constructively, in a win-win fashion. The team makes decisions with the objective in mind of maintaining a sense of balance between the individual and the team. Overall, there is a genuine atmosphere of *...trust, understanding, mutual respect, and co-operation to encourage the individual and collective development and use of human potential*. Understanding *how* groups evolve, and learning simple, but powerful, group leader skills, can give you an edge in helping to facilitate *your* group through the various phases of its development. The following represents a collection of the *sociological tools* that will help you in reading and facilitating your group's dynamics.



The Force Field

■ YOUR NORMATIVE BAROMETER ■

Picture yourself walking down the street and suddenly, you hear an extremely loud bang along with the sound of twisting metal. You follow the sound to the railroad tracks and see that a horrendous train wreck has occurred. You are one of the first responders to arrive on the scene to help. You immediately run to the passenger cars, some of which have flipped onto their sides. You work your way to the door, force it open and enter the car.

You quickly assess the state of each of the passengers. Roughly 50% of the passengers are OK and are exiting the car and/or helping others. You notice about another 10% are just shaken up, but are able to get out without your assistance. Another 20% have minor injuries. You do what you can, give them first aid instructions to address their condition, and move on deeper into the car where the damage is really heavy.

Here, the remaining 20% of the passengers have suffered severe trauma. Sadly, 3% have already died. Another 5% are barely alive, but their injuries are so great that no matter what you do, you will not save them. So, you focus your efforts on the remaining 12% of the passengers who are in critical condition, but have higher possibility of surviving with your intervention.

In the above analogy, 80% of the passengers have survived the train wreck and have minimal need for your “first responder” intervention. Of the remaining 20%, with some luck and timely medical intervention, another 12% may survive if you can correctly diagnose and treat their trauma, whereas, the last 8% is beyond help. All totaled, 80 to 92% of the passengers will survive the train wreck.

As a leader, you must be able to observe the behaviors of your followers and, as in the above analogy, triage them into sub-groups of individuals who, in your estimation, will support and assist you on your path, those who will be cautious/inconsistent in their support, and those who will potentially sabotage and/or undermine you. The ***Force Field*** is a tool that will bring these dynamics to light.

In using the Force Field, you will have a better understanding of where the normative culture is within your group. It is similar to a coach's depth chart which visually indicates the names of the players by the positions they play, whether they are the starting players, second team back-ups, third team, etc. The Force Field enables you to assess the normative behavior of your group in order to have an overview of the total picture of what is occurring behaviorally. (See Page 78)

To begin with, you must first identify the behavioral criteria for your group. For instance, in Chapter 3, the behavioral characteristics that define the NORMATIVE Leader were presented. These characteristics can be used to explain how to use the Force Field. The criteria were as follows:

A Belief in God (Principles), Helpathetic Attitude, Vision, Self-confidence, Risk taker, Political Savvy, People Skills, Decision maker, Integrity, Perseverance

Once all of the criteria have been identified, define in a short paragraph, three to five sentences, what it means to model each of the characteristics. This way, all will have an understanding of the behaviors that are deemed acceptable within the culture, and can then recognize when behavior exhibited by others does not meet the criteria. Once completed, you should then assess each of the group members according to how you feel they model the criteria.

Always remember, ***information/evidence is self-serving according to the beliefs of the person interpreting it.*** So, before you begin the Force Field Assessment of your group, ***S.T.O.P.*** and review your objectives and intentions. Completing this assessment should be seen as an ***educational exercise*** to create more of an awareness of what is happening within the group in order to make it better. Trust and honesty are essential. If used for hurtful purposes, it can destroy a group. Remember, too, that each group member models the criteria in varying degrees. Therefore, assess them according to their ***overall*** behavior they model within the group.

When I first learned about the Force Field, there were only three columns. They were titled, positive neutral and negative. As I evolved the model, I added two additional columns and changed the column titles to reflect a more generic model that could be universally applied to any group. Those who consistently model the criteria should be placed in the ***strength column***. Quite simply, individuals in the strength column are those you would take with you if you were starting a new group. Those who consistently model the opposite of the criteria should be placed in the ***opportunity column***. I call this column ***opportunity***, because it is an opportunity for you, and the group members, to help the individual(s) via your 1-1 interventions, along with peer support, to change their behavior. It is also an opportunity for the individual to take an introspective look at his behavior in order to grow and be a greater part of the group. Opportunity behavior is disruptive to the group process and those who model it, must be challenged by the leader/group to conform to the norms of the group and be accountable for their behavior in some way.

The term *opportunity* is used rather than *negative* for two reasons. First, if an individual is labeled as negative, he might respond to this *self-fulfilling prophecy* by being what everyone expects him to be — a person with a negative attitude. Secondly, psychologically, others will be cautious or defensive when dealing with this individual and, therefore, allow their bias toward this person to enter into their interactions with him. Thus, the term *opportunity* is a more helpful term for *negative*. Therefore, if an individual is assessed in this column, remember this: ***it's an opportunity for the person to turn himself around and align his behavior with those associated with the strength column, and it is an opportunity for you, the leader, to use your skills in managing this individual into the strength column.*** Supportive, yet challenging!

Those individuals who were not placed in the *strength* or *opportunity* column can be placed in the *developmental column*. These are individuals who have not yet asserted themselves behaviorally. They take a kind of "middle of the road" approach until they decide, or the situation forces them to decide, which column they will move toward. They need, as the column suggests, further development to realize their individual potential. The *on-the-line* columns are used to denote movement of an individual from one column to the next. An arrow is placed next to their name pointing in the direction the individual is moving toward. **Note: Arrows are used only for the on-the-line columns.**

If most of the names of the individuals on the Force Field are in the *strength* column, the culture is positive. If most are in the *opportunity* column, the culture is in trouble. If most are in the *developmental* column, the culture is in a *norms crisis* but can shift to either *strength* or *opportunity* — depending on the type of leadership you provide as you manage your group. (See the following example).

The Force Field Assessment is a very powerful tool for the NORMATIVE Leader to use, especially in the control phase of the group's development. Knowing which of your followers are in congruence with *the criteria that you define for your group*, allows you to develop specific strategies to address the behavioral issues, both individually and collectively, to be more effective in facilitating your followers' behavioral transitions into the strength column.

This is an excellent exercise to complete with your inner circle of informal leaders or your management team. Obviously, trust is a factor, for this process usually invites an honest discussion regarding the various opinions where you, and your colleagues, feel certain individuals should be placed on the Force Field. Remember, the objective is not to use this tool to hurt others. It is to be used to understand *why* an individual has gravitated to a certain column, but more importantly, to identify what can be done to help him move toward the strength column.

Another powerful tool that works in conjunction with the Force Field, is *The Polsky Diamond*.