

GROUP SUPERVISION

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A Kenyan proverb accurately summarizes the subject at hand in simple words: "Sticks in a bundle are unbreakable." On that note, group supervision involves the use of a group setting to allow members to reflect on their work in which the purpose of the session is to develop the skills and ability of both individuals and the group. Supervising one on one is challenging but supervising a group of supervisees effectively requires knowledge and skills well beyond the norm. Groups bring with them the individual personalities from extroverts to introverts to everything in between.

Dr Philip Armstrong, the special guest lecturer, is a world-renowned presenter, educator, and leader in the mental health community. He is also well-known for his work as the CEO of the Australian Counselling Association (ACA) and as the Secretary-General of Asia Pacific Confederation of Counsellors.

There are three different types of group supervision to state: peer, one on one, group. While the best mode of groups varies, group supervision has many advantages and some disadvantages. However, the greatest challenge for the Supervisor is group cohesion and cooperation. To be able to effectively run a group a Supervisor should have a solid understanding of group dynamics and human behaviors. Each member of the group has an equal right to be heard, respected and be given a safe place from where they can disagree or discuss sensitive issues. A poorly run group will lead to individuals being bullied, controlled through peer group pressure, and becoming afraid of being honest.



Before being able to run a group and understand group dynamics you first need to have a solid knowledge of personalities. If a group facilitator lacks the skills and knowledge to work effectively with different personalities, this can have negative impact on the success, sustainability, cohesiveness, and participatory outcomes of the group.

While working in groups, there are some common personality types that one will encounter in a group setting. These are broadly categorized into six groups, some of which are obvious to observe and supervise.

One of such personalities is widely termed as “Sour Grapes”. We have all encountered someone like this — the person with the ‘glass is half empty’ approach. There is always something amiss, something to fret about, and their problem is always ten times worse than yours. This type of personality can bring the group down. The actions that can be exercised would be to share something positive, provide constructive feedback, face them in private, and demonstrate to them the required reframing.

A group activity was recommended to enhance our understanding. In pairs we had to complete a role-play of the group facilitator talking with The Sour Grapes about their negative attitude. One person played the role of the facilitator, and the other person played the role of The Sour Grapes. At the conclusion of the role-play the person playing The Sour Grapes provided feedback to the person playing the facilitator. This focused on the strengths of the interaction, and any areas for improvement. Then we swapped roles and repeated the process.

Another personality it is normal to come across is “The Born Leader”. This person knows how to work a crowd. They have natural leadership abilities. They may already be in some type of leadership role. This can be great for the group. They can be helpful with the facilitation of small group activities, and they will certainly contribute to group discussions. The danger here is that they may take over, or want to take over your facilitation role.

It can be knotty to rein in The Born Leader, but speaking to them before the group work starts is doable. Setting ground rules based on the equity of participation and closing them down respectfully are some strategies to use.

Another group discussion was recommended for The Born Leader personality type. As a group, we had to discuss the experiences of working with this personality type. The focus was on these questions: What has been effective in working with The Born Leader? What has been ineffective in working with The Born Leader?

A distinct personality to notice is "The Introvert". This person may be shy and quiet, and would normally prefer the company of a smaller group (or their own company!) In fact, a larger group setting, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the group members, may be their worst nightmare! Nevertheless, they are in your group, and as a facilitator, you can assist with making their time in the group as comfortable as possible.

A few methods to approach this personality is by breaking the large group into smaller groups, providing small breaks during the group session, and praising them when they contribute. Sometimes, it is better to not continually remark on the fact that this personality is quiet and does not say much.

The group discussion's motive was to discuss encounters of working with this personality type. Then focus on these questions: What has been effective in working with The Introvert? What has been ineffective in working with The Introvert and what strengths could The Introvert bring to a group setting?

"The Egomaniac" is easy to discern. These people resist direction, they think they always know what is best and they ignore advice or suggestions. Not only do they think they do not need to improve, they think everyone should consider themselves lucky to be in a group with them; one of the more difficult personalities to work with.

To handle The Egomaniac, it is significant to recognize that they may require some one-on-one time with you for an attitude check. Ground rules will be useful, in particular rules that focus upon listening respectfully and remembering to check your own ego at the door. Having a head to head with them is usually not worth the time and energy.

The group activity that ensued was involved in identifying the prior personality. In pairs we had to complete a role-play of the group facilitator talking with The Egomaniac about their behaviors. One person played the role of the facilitator, and the other person played the role of The Egomaniac. At the conclusion of the role-play the person playing The Egomaniac had to provide feedback to the person playing the facilitator. This focused on the strengths of the interaction, and any areas for improvement. Then we swapped roles and repeated the process.

On the flip side, opposite to "The Introvert", is "The Extrovert". Here we have our people person. The Extrovert thrives on being with others, and therefore the group environment could be their dream come true. You probably won't have too much trouble engaging The Extrovert, and they will most likely be willing and able to participate in group discussions and activities.



Some strategies to keep in mind when handling "The Extrovert", is to encourage them to use their people skills by facilitating some small group activities. Extroverts can tend to go off-topic. If this is the case gently make a statement to bring the group back on topic. They can have a tendency to enjoy a bit of gossip. Some gossip is normal for relationship building and can be fun however some gossip can be toxic. Keep a lid on this by having a ground-rule regarding confidentiality within the group. You may from time to time have to call out these behaviors.

A group discussion was recommended to discuss experiences of working with this personality type. The focus was on these questions: What has been effective in working with The Extrovert? What has been ineffective in working with The Extrovert?

A critical character to stumble upon is "The Volcano". Much like the geographical wonder, this personality is often described as angry. They are a ticking time bomb that could off at any given moment. We have all seen it before; screaming, yelling, and throwing things; usually all over something seen as trivial to other people. They do have a tendency to make some people (even the Group Facilitator) feel on edge.

To strategically handle this character, it is imperative to speak with them privately. Use active listening skills to investigate what might be going with them. It is also right to get to know their triggers gradually. If one of their triggers, for example, is the group not commencing on time recognize that it's frustrating when this happens, and come up with strategies to ensure that this potential trigger doesn't keep occurring. If the Volcano has engaged in a particularly fiery episode ask them to have some 'time-out' to cool off. In some cases, The Volcano may need a referral for other services, such as counselling, if there are personal issues, they need assistance with.

The only way to learn the rules of anything practical is to begin by the thing. Groups require rules so that all those in the group know exactly what the boundaries are, to be able to participate effectively. Each individual in the group must not only know the rules but also what are the parameters in relation to their conduct. Without an understanding of the rules, and how the group and each individual in it are to conduct themselves, the group turns into a mob.



Some of the most certain advantages of working in groups are true as much as they are obvious. Group supervision ensures greater resources, increase in creativity, and enhanced communication skills between supervisees. Along with quality outcomes and better decisions being made, it enables economies to grow into a larger scale.

Working in groups can promote learning pleasure, the enjoyment of bonding in a group, self-affirmation from participation, and improved motivation from the group experience. Participation in the group may be therapeutic where relating is part of the client problem, and participation and observation of clients in action can aid assessment.



Upon the whole, as we appreciate the advantages of working in groups, sometimes, there can be a negative aspect. Like the difficulties of conformity or diminished individual performance. However, the advantages most definitely outweigh the disadvantages.

The event came to a close and I have never felt more rejuvenated to move forward with so much knowledge. It was a brilliant lecturer from an experienced lecturer. I am excited and looking forward to more!