

CHAPTER 5. ORGANIZING GROUPS AND TEAMS

CHAPTER 5 OVERVIEW

Chapter 5 Summary

In Chapter 5, the authors explore the structural features of small groups and ways to restructure groups to improve their performance and their ability to respond to members' needs. They view small groups as microcosms of large organizations, governed by the same basic structural characteristics, elements, tensions, and pressures.

Finding the right pattern of roles and relationships, differentiation, and integration for a small group requires careful consideration of a number of important variables: task, technology, goals, and environment; members' skills, talents, values, and priorities; and the members' history and experience of working together. The authors list six structural characteristics of high-performing teams:

1. They shape purpose in response to a demand or opportunity put in their path.
2. They translate common purpose into specific, measurable performance goals.
3. They are of manageable size.
4. They develop the right mix of expertise.
5. They develop a common commitment to how people will work together.
6. They hold themselves collectively accountable.

Chapter 5 Key Terms

Circle network: Network in which information and decisions flow sequentially from one group member to another.

All-channel network: Network in which multiple connections enable each member to communicate directly with any other member; also called a *star network*.

Chapter 5 Major Case Examples

- Dr. Peter Minich and his transplant team
- A high-performing U.S. Army commando unit
- Baseball, football, and basketball teams
- Development of a new drug by a pharmaceutical company
- Saturn revisited

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SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING CHAPTER 5

The central ideas in Chapter 5 revolve around the impact of structure on group effectiveness. Small groups and teams do much of the work in today's organizations, and a well-run group is more than a matter of good interpersonal relationships. Recognizing the effect of structural concerns such as roles, communication networks, designated relationship patterns, differentiation, and coordination is powerful learning. There are a number of ways to think about working with the central ideas in this chapter. Here, we suggest two:

1. A focus on understanding the overall connections between structure and group effectiveness.
2. A focus on providing opportunities for students to experience the impact of structure on group process.

Teaching methods appropriate for each approach are described in the sections that follow. Student exercises keyed to the approaches appear in "Student Exercises for Chapter 5," beginning on page 6.

Reminder: When planning the teaching of this chapter, instructors may want to think ahead about how they will explore the human resource aspects of groups (Chapter 8). There are ways to connect teaching activities for these two sets of group issues. See, for example, the suggestion offered in "Chapter 5: Connecting Structural and Human Resource Concerns."

Chapter 5: A Focus on Understanding Structure and Group Effectiveness

A number of cases and movies offer opportunities for clarifying and discussing structural aspects of groups. Since most also contain information about more human resource and interpersonal issues, instructors can work to distinguish between the two sets of variables.

Chapter 5: Cases Focusing on Understanding Structure and Group Effectiveness

- Nigel Andrews and General Electric Plastics (HBS 4-492-020) is a case study of an empowered problem-solving team that makes a decision that conflicts with a management decision.
- Buck and Pulleyn's Team Management (HBS 497-007) describes a firm's effort to move from a traditional hierarchical structure to one based on teams.

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- The Overhead Reduction Task Force (HBS 400-026, with teaching note, HBS 400-027, and video, HBS 400-502) provides a look at the challenges of building an effective team from launch to post-performance debriefing.
- A nontraditional case that adds the interactions between gender and structure is Robert Schrank's *Two Women, Three Men on a Raft* (*Harvard Business Review*, May–June 1977, reprint #77311).
- Other cases include:
 - The Slade Company (HBS 9-406-074).
 - Century Co. ([A] [HBS 9-406-021], [B] [HBS 9-406-022], and [C] [HBS 9-406-023]).
 - The Merit Co., found in either *Note on Stable Work Groups* (HBS 1-475-030) or *A Framework for Analyzing Workgroups* (HBS 9-480-009).
 - Atlas Corp. ([A] [HBS 9-406-036], [B] [HBS 9-406-037], [C] [HBS 9-406-038], [D] [HBS 9-406-039], and [E] [HBS 9-406-040]).
 - Harwick, Smyth & Blanchard, Inc. ([A] [HBS 9-413-137] and [B] [HBS 9-413-138]).
 - Battleship Y (HBS 9-446-026).
 - Beauty Care Products, Inc. (HBS 9-472-063).

Chapter 5: Films or Videos Focusing on Understanding Structure and Group Effectiveness

Such films as *Glory*, *Hoosiers*, *Stripes*, *Twelve O'Clock High*, *M*A*S*H*, and *Bridge on the River Kwai* focus on the workings of small groups and illustrate structural issues.

- *Glory* contrasts Colonel Shaw's strict adherence to military rules and procedures (and the implications for his early leadership) with his later abilities to “work” the rules to his leadership advantage. Ways to illustrate the role of rules and adherence to military structures in Shaw's leadership include:
 1. Contrasting the scene in which a tearful Shaw has one of his men publicly whipped for desertion because the man left camp to find boots for his badly ulcerated feet—boots that Shaw had been unable to secure through regular military channels—with Shaw's later acceptance of a refusal by the same man, who had been particularly brave in the unit's first battle, to carry the U.S. flag as a standard military reward.
 2. Contrasting the same whipping scene with Shaw's response sometime later to a military ruling barring black men from becoming commissioned commanding officers. (Shaw accepts the military dictum and chooses to make the informal leader of his unit a noncommissioned commanding officer instead.)

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- *Hoosiers* examines the development of a championship basketball team in a poor rural school and complements the sports examples used in the chapter. The scene in which the new coach institutes different team rules and new structures for practice, despite the protest of team members and parents, leads to strong discussion about the impact of structure on group cohesiveness, identity, and productivity.
- A series of videos from Workvideos focuses on highly effective teams:
 - *Computer Emergency Response Team* tells the story of a group at Carnegie-Mellon University whose mission is rapid response to attacks on the Internet.
 - *Chamber Music Quartet* focuses on a noted string quartet, the Cuarteto Latinoamericano.
 - *Chinese String Quartet* tells a parallel story of a quartet based in Singapore that plays traditional Chinese stringed instruments.
 - *Rowing in an 8* explores the story behind the success of an undefeated women's crew at Cornell.Structural issues such as roles and coordination are issues in all of the teams. In addition, relationships and culture play major roles, so these videos could also be used in connection with Chapters 8 and 14. Preview clips from most of the videos are available at <http://www.workvideos.com/>.
- Other film options include the HBS video of the case *Meeting of the Overhead Reduction Task Force*, which shows how the group implements its chosen structures, and the HBS video of the *Portland String Quartet*, which illustrates the role of rules, roles, and procedures in an artistic enterprise. Contrasting the Portland String Quartet with the more technically focused business group in *Overhead Reduction Task Force* makes for good discussion about the enduring features of groups as well as the ways in which unique tasks affect group choices.

Chapter 5: Connecting Structural and Human Resource Concerns

As mentioned, instructors may want to connect teaching activities for the structural issues considered in Chapter 5 and the human resource issues considered in Chapter 8. For example, when working with this chapter, instructors might want to discuss the case Meeting of the Overhead Reduction Task Force (HBS 9-478-013), mentioned above, which raises a number of structural questions (What is an appropriate division of labor for the task force? What are the connections between the group's structure and task? Goals? Time and environmental influences?). They might then show the *Overhead Reduction Task Force* video (HBS, also mentioned above) when working with the human resource perspective to explore the ways in which group dynamics and interpersonal behavior between members add a different twist to the issues and questions faced by the task force.

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Chapter 5: A Focus on Experiencing the Impact of Structure on Group Effectiveness

Students may benefit from opportunities to experience the power of structure in action. Instructors can use existing small groups within the class or create new groups to give students this experience. Activities of both types are presented in “Student Exercises for Chapter 5.”

Other possible group activities include in-basket exercises, the allocation of some scarce resource (instructors can simulate an organizational situation or make it realistic by offering students a desirable class perkquisite), lists for groups to rank-order (instructors can be creative in designing their own lists or rely on standards such as “Lost on the Moon” or its many variations). Rank ordering and allocation of resources activities can be done in fishbowls, offering the additional benefits of observer feedback to working groups.

The J. W. Pfeiffer and J. E. Jones series *A Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relationship Training* (formerly published by University Associates, now published by Wiley) is a resource for other possible suggestions. Examples of relevant group problem-solving activities from these handbooks include the following:

- #29—Group Task Suggestions (vol. 2).
- #30—Consensus-Seeking: A Group Ranking Task (vol. 2).
- #31—Problem Solving: Lutts and Mipps (vol. 2).
- #34—In-Basket (vol. 2).
- #102—Shoe Store: Group Problem Solving (vol. 4).
- #103—Joe Doodlebug: Group Problem Solving (vol. 4).
- #117—Pine County: Information Sharing (vol. 4).
- #200—Word-Letter: A Problem Solving Activity (vol. 6).
- #260—Island Commission: Group Problem Solving (vol. 7).
- #267—Whom to Choose: Values and Group Decision Making (vol. 7).

Instructors might want to design activities for groups to experience select aspects of structure, such as the power of roles, implicit in the commando unit story. Again, instructors can be creative in designing their own activities or rely on suggestions from

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the Pfeiffer and Jones series. Examples of group activities on the power of roles from this series include:

- #203—Headbands: Group Role Expectations (vol. 6).
- #207—Staff Meeting: A Leadership Role Play (vol. 6).
- #214—Roles Impact Feelings: A Role Play (vol. 6).

Examples of activities on communication networks include:

- #108—Ball Game: Controlling and Influencing Communication (vol. 4).
- #110—Organizational Structures: Communication Patterns (vol. 4).

STUDENT EXERCISES FOR CHAPTER 5

EXERCISE 5.1

Focus: Experiencing the Impact of Structure on Group Effectiveness

Assign students to two groups, one organized by a clear bureaucratic hierarchy, the other a loose, participative confederation. Providing appropriate materials, give each group the same task—building a kite. The group that gets its kite to fly first wins the competition. Debrief the exercise by having the class debate the advantages and limitations of each structural form.

EXERCISE 5.2

Focus: Experiencing the Impact of Structure on Group Effectiveness

Make use of task or study groups that are already a regular part of the course by creating fishbowls, in which a group works on its assignment (one possible assignment is to discuss the group's structure) while others observe the group looking for structural issues—roles, communication patterns, differentiation, integration mechanisms, and so on. (You can also use this activity to drill or review the central elements of the structural frame.)

Groups that have already diagnosed their own structural arrangements while working with issues in previous chapters can use this activity to compare their structural intentions with what others see as their “real” structure in action or to explore the ways in which group development has led to restructuring. After feedback from observers,

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students can explore the appropriateness of the group's choices given its task, environment, technology, members' needs and skills, and so on, reinforcing the notion that small groups are indeed microcosms of larger organizations.

EXERCISE 5.3

Focus: Experiencing the Impact of Structure on Group Effectiveness

Create small groups with short-term tasks to explore structural concerns. The Construction Company simulation developed by Lee Bolman and Barbara Bunker is a fun intergroup activity that offers opportunities to examine structural choices and their implications for group effectiveness. Processing can include discussion of a wide range of issues, such as differentiation and integration, roles, authority, communication patterns, utilization of resources, the impact of the group's external environment, work space, physical environment, the requirements of the task and technology, time constraints, and so on. Instructors should also note that the Construction Company simulation has two phases that parallel the two phases in the commando group example in the next chapter: a planning phase and a production phase.

Instructions for the simulation are as follows:

Task: To construct the greatest number of houses according to specifications in one five-minute building period.

Materials: 200 3-by-5 index cards, two red and two black felt-tipped markers, and one roll of clear tape for each work group.

Room arrangement: Space for each team to plan and one designated space for public construction (a large table or desk is perfect).

Process:

- Teams may plan for as long as they wish.
- Each team will have one five-minute public construction period.
- No materials that have been bent, folded, torn, taped, or marked may be used in the public construction phase.
- When teams are ready to start their construction, they should notify the instructor, who also acts as the judge.

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- Building permits cost \$2 per group and are to be purchased when a group is ready to build. (Instructors can vary the amount depending on the group.)
- The judge will announce when any team is entering public construction.
- All teams must begin construction by a time posted by the instructor. Only one team can construct at a time. If two teams request a permit to build at the same time, the judge shall determine to whom the first permit is issued. All decisions of the judge are final.
- The winning team will be awarded the money in the building fund.

House specifications: All houses must:

- Be two stories high.
- Have a peaked roof.
- Have a brick chimney with holes for smoke (that is, more than one dimension).
- Have at least four framed windows on the second floor and two doors and two windows on the first floor.
- Have a floor between stories.
- Withstand the judge's quality test: a drop from twelve inches without being damaged or falling apart.

Time requirements: At least one and one-fourth to one and one-half hours for teams to work before the construction deadline. Time should be set aside for groups to debrief and then for a general class discussion.