

Identifying Group Roles

(From Kenneth Benne and Paul Sheats, 1948, "Functional Roles of Group Members", *Journal of Social Issues*, 4(2), pp. 41-49.)

Task Roles

These are the roles that relate to getting the work done. They represent the different roles needed to take a project step-by-step from initial conception through to action. (Individuals may fulfill many of these roles during the life of a project.)

- **Initiator/Contributor** – Proposes original ideas or different ways of approaching group problems or goals. This role initiates discussions and move groups into new areas of exploration.
- **Information Seeker** – Requests clarification of comments in terms of their factual adequacy. Seeks expert information or facts relevant to the problem. Determines what information is missing and needs to be found before moving forward.
- **Information Giver** – Provides factual information to the group. Is seen as an authority on the subject and relates own experience when relevant.
- **Opinion Seeker** – Asks for clarification of the values, attitudes, and opinions of group members. Checks to make sure different perspectives are given.
- **Opinion Giver** – Expresses his or her own opinions and beliefs about the subject being discussed. Often states opinions in terms of what the group "should" do.
- **Elaborator** – Takes other people's initial ideas and builds on them with examples, relevant facts and data. Also looks at the consequences of proposed ideas and actions.
- **Co-ordinator** – Identifies and explains the relationships between ideas. May pull together a few different ideas and make them cohesive.
- **Orienter** – Reviews and clarifies the group's position. Provides a summary of what has been accomplished, notes where the group has veered off course, and suggests how to get back on target.
- **Evaluator/Critic** – Evaluates proposals against a predetermined or objective standard. Assesses the reasonableness of a proposal and looks at whether it is fact-based and manageable as a solution.
- **Energizer** – Concentrates the group's energy on forward movement. Challenges and stimulates the group to take further action.
- **Procedural Technician** – Facilitates group discussion by taking care of logistical concerns like where meetings are to take place and what supplies are needed for each meeting.
- **Recorder** – Acts as the secretary or minute-keeper. Records ideas and keeps track of what goes on at each meeting.

Personal and/or Social Roles

These roles contribute to the positive functioning of the group.

- **Encourager** – Affirms, supports, and praises the efforts of fellow group members. Demonstrates warmth and provides a positive attitude in meetings.
- **Harmonizer** – Conciliates differences between individuals. Seeks ways to reduce tension and diffuse a situation by providing further explanations or using humor.
- **Compromiser** – Offers to change his or her position for the good of the group. Willing to yield position or meet others half way.
- **Gatekeeper/Expediter** – Regulates the flow of communication. Makes sure all members have a chance to express themselves by encouraging the shy and quiet members to contribute their ideas. Limits those who

dominate the conversation and may suggest group rules or standards that ensure everyone gets a chance to speak up.

- **Observer/Commentator** – Provides feedback to the group about how it is functioning. Often seen when a group wants to set, evaluate, or change its standards and processes.
- **Follower** – Accepts what others say and decide even though he or she has not contributed to the decision or expressed own thoughts. Seen as a listener not a contributor.

Dysfunctional and/or Individualistic Roles

These roles disrupt group progress and weaken its cohesion.

- **Aggressor** – Makes personal attacks using belittling and insulting comments, for example, "That's the most ridiculous idea I've ever heard." Actions are usually an attempt to decrease another member's status.
- **Blocker** – Opposes every idea or opinion that is put forward and yet refuses to make own suggestions, for example, "That's not a good idea." The result is that the group stalls because it can't get past the resistance.
- **Recognition Seeker** – Uses group meetings to draw personal attention to him or herself. May brag about past accomplishments or relay irrelevant stories that paint him or her in a positive light. Sometimes pulls crazy stunts to attract attention like acting silly, making excess noise, or otherwise directing members away from the task at hand.
- **Self-Confessor** – Uses the group meetings as an avenue to disclose personal feelings and issues. Tries to slip these comments in under the guise of relevance, such as "That reminds me of a time when." May relate group actions to his or her personal life. For example, if two others are disagreeing about something, the Self-confessor may say, "You guys fight just like me and my wife."
- **Disrupter/Jokester** – Uses group meetings as fun time and a way to get out of real work. Distracts other people by telling jokes, playing pranks, or even reading unrelated material.
- **Dominator** – Tries to control the conversation and dictate what people should be doing. Often exaggerates his or her knowledge and will monopolize any conversation claiming to know more about the situation and have better solutions than anybody else.
- **Help Seeker** – Actively looks for sympathy by expressing feelings of inadequacy. Acts helpless, self deprecating and unable to contribute. For example, "I can't help you, I'm too confused and useless with this stuff."
- **Special Interest Pleader** – Makes suggestions based on what others would think or feel. Avoids revealing his or her own biases or opinions by using a stereotypical position instead, for example, "The people over in Admin sure wouldn't like that idea." or "You know how cheap our suppliers are, they won't go for that."