

L01 Overview

Introduction

In this lesson, you will learn about the pervasiveness of groups in everyday life, as well as why it is important to know about groups and to be able to function in them. You will also discover that what occurs in groups is not random in nature, but system-like. To have this understanding is to be more easily able to have impact on how they function when solving problems, making decisions, and performing other sorts of tasks.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- develop an appreciation for the pervasiveness of groups in everyday life.
- begin to recognize how group membership affects individual attitudes, values, beliefs, and behavior, as well as people and events in the surrounding environment.
- understand the systematic nature of group process.
- achieve the realization that success and failure in group life are not accidental, but rather direct consequences of the ways in which members of groups interact with one another.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Chapters 1 and 3 of the textbook
- Read: Lesson 1 lecture content

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L02 Overview

Introduction

Lesson 2 exposes you to the notion of communication as "processual." This means that much of what occurs when we interact with others is shaped by our relationships to those others, what we bring to the situation, and characteristics of the situation itself. Our exchanges, in turn, have consequences for our relationships, who we are, and the outcomes we experience.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- be aware of basic principles of human communication.
- overcome common myths concerning communication.
- develop an appreciation of the dual roles of speaking and listening in successful communication.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Chapter 2, pp. 21–38 of the textbook
- Read: Lesson 2 lecture content
- Watch: The 6 Steps for Effective Communication video (Time: 00:02:56)

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L03 Overview

Introduction

When we hear the term "communication," most of us almost automatically think about talking. Yet, much of what we have to say occurs at a nonverbal level. Moreover, the messages that nonverbal aspects of our communicative behavior convey can be, and often are, as significant as what our words may signal to those with whom we interact. This can be particularly true in groups. In Lesson 3, you will learn much more about what some people think of as the "hidden dimension" of human communication and how it functions to influence perceptions, thoughts, and actions when people find themselves in groups.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- understand that success in communication depends on not only verbal factors, but nonverbal factors as well.
- appreciate the fact that inconsistency in one's verbal and nonverbal behavior can result in confusion.
- recognize the many different ways in which nonverbal aspects of messages combine to influence meanings.
- have a vocabulary for nonverbal behavior that enables one more easily to analyze communicative exchanges.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Chapter 2, pp. 38–54 of the textbook.
- Read: Lesson 3 lecture content
- Watch: 8 Types of Nonverbal Communication video (Time: 00:03:29)

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L04 Overview

Introduction

People often have difficulty communicating with one another as a result of differences in their cultural backgrounds, orientations, and experiences. We find ourselves perplexed, for instance, by others' apparent lack of understanding of what we are trying to say, as well as by why they seem to be behaving in what we consider to be an inappropriate manner, even though we are speaking the same language as it were. The reasons for these reactions are often grounded in differences in the attitudes, beliefs, values, and patterns of behavior to which we have been exposed as we develop our identities through socialization processes over time in the groups to which we have the greatest amount of exposure. Culture is what gives different groups of people their identity, or uniqueness. Identity, however, can also be a source of difficulty interacting with others who do not share yours. In Lesson 4, you will discover how and why.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- understand what culture is.
- recognize that differences in the cultural backgrounds of group members can be both problematic and beneficial in the completion of tasks.
- appreciate the value of diversity in groups.
- develop intercultural competence in the performance of tasks involving groups of diverse cultural composition.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Chapter 4 of the textbook.
- Read: Lesson 4 lecture content

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L05 Overview

Introduction

Lesson 5 gives you the opportunity to apply some of what you have been learning to this point from the vantage point of an observer of a group of people interacting to come to an agreement concerning what to do in a situation in which the participants have a mutual interest in achieving a good outcome but possibly differing views of what that would be and how to go about achieving it. Observing others in groups perform decision-making tasks can be illuminating in ways that being a member oneself is not. This lesson also gives you an opportunity to work with evaluative tools that may help you to arrive at a better understanding in a given case of why a group performs well, ineffectively, or possibly both at different times.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- recognize ways in which patterns of interaction among group members affect their performance.
- be able to use your observations of others as a basis either for avoiding behavior that has negative impact or emulating behavior that has positive impact.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Chapter 12 of the textbook.
- Read: Lesson 5 lecture content.

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L06 Overview

Introduction

In Lesson 6, the emphasis is on the characteristics of members of groups (Chapter 5) and of groups as entities themselves (Chapter 6), which ones appear to have the greatest impact on the communicative exchanges that occur in groups, and how the interaction affects the performance of the members, and how that, in turn, contributes to the outcomes, both task-related (e.g., decision quality) and relational (e.g., group cohesion). You will learn that a group can be successful in both respects, one but not the other, or neither as a result of particular combinations of the members' personal attributes and others of the group as a whole.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- recognize the ways in which the skills and other characteristics of the members of groups contribute to and detract from performance.
- appreciate the fact that groups are in a continual state of evolution and that communication is the chief factor responsible for how the norms, roles, relationships, and structure of groups form and change over time.
- understand how communication, norms, roles, relationships, and structures combine to define the culture of groups.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Chapters 5 and 6 of the textbook.
- Read: Lesson 6 lecture content.
- Watch: Remember The Titans - Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Adjourning (Time: 00:08:33)

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L07 Overview

Introduction

In completing Lesson 7, you will be partially preparing for Lesson 8, which involves the presentation of a problem-solving speech to an audience. Doing well requires that one incorporate pertinent information from qualified sources. Lesson 7 will help you in locating such information, as well as in selecting what will be of most value in completing preparations for the speech you will be doing for Lesson 08.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- appreciate the variety of sources of information on which one can draw for group discussions and individual speeches.
- know ways in which to reduce information to forms that facilitate its use.
- become more skillful in evaluating information in preparing for discussions and speeches.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Appendix A (pp. 383–391).
- Read: Lesson 7 lecture content.

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L08 Overview

Introduction

Lesson 8 involves you in the extemporaneous presentation of a problem-solving speech to an audience of your choosing. Not only will the lesson give you an opportunity to develop skill in presenting ideas in an organized fashion and with appropriate support in the form of relevant information from qualified sources, it lays a useful foundation for participating in group activities that come later in the course in the form of a problem-solving symposium (Lesson 11), a problem-solving group discussion (Lesson 13), and a decision-making discussion (Lesson 15).

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- develop skill in speaking extemporaneously.
- learn how to relate information to ideas.
- be used to thinking about problem solving as both a type of speaking and as a way of addressing personal and social issues.
- be able to hone your ability to organize material in a way that is clear, comprehensible, and interesting to others.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Appendix B (pp. 392–409).
- Read: Lesson 8 lecture content

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L09 Overview

Introduction

In completing Lesson 9, you will learn about the role of leadership in problem-solving and decision-making groups, both at a theoretical level (that is, what we know about the subject) and at practical level (that is, what one can do to exercise influence in groups more effectively in the interest of improving their performance). An important aspect of leadership, whether one is an appointed leader or emerges in the course of a group's interactions, involves the management of conflicts in groups, which is both common and often harmful in respect to achieving desired outcomes. You will come to see that such management is more easily possible when one knows about the nature of interpersonal conflict, measures for limiting its occurrence, and steps one can take to reduce its potential negative impact when it does arise.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- develop an understanding of the nature and role of leadership in problem-solving and decision-making groups, as well as the qualities that contribute to effective leadership.
- know what approaches to and methods of managing conflicts among the members of problem-solving and decision-making groups are most likely to result in satisfactory outcomes.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Chapters 7, 8, and 11 of the textbook.
- Read: Lesson 9 lecture content.

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L10 Overview

Introduction

Lesson 10 is preparatory to Lesson #11. You will have to develop an outline for a presentation in a forthcoming symposium, as well as note and establish the qualifications the sources you will be using in articulating one possible solution to a problem the group in which you are a member has selected. You will also have the opportunity to interact with the other panelists once all of the formal presentations have been completed. This will be helpful in making the transition from formal public presentations in Lesson 08 and Lesson 10 to the highly interactive environments in which you will find yourself in Lesson 13 and Lesson 15.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- know how to prepare for formal presentations.
- develop familiarity with a format frequently followed in public discussions.
- be able to coordinate efforts with other group members to select a discussion topic, divide responsibility, and become ready for a group discussion utilizing the format.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Appendix B (pp. 392–409).
- Read: Lesson 10 lecture content.

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L11 Overview

Introduction

For Lesson 11, you will take part in a problem-solving symposium, in which each member of your group will present a different solution to a problem the members have selected and previously agreed to; for example, "What can be done to expand affordable opportunities for post-secondary education for all who may qualify?" You will not only present a solution that is different from those of the other participants, but also make a case for endorsing it that can be defended in terms of information from qualified sources.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- be conversant in the type of group discussion known as a symposium.
- develop additional experience in making formal presentations.
- transition easily from formal presentations involving problem solving to the less restrictive and more interactive environments of problem-solving and decision-making discussion.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Lesson 11 lecture content.

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L12 Overview

Introduction

For Lesson 12, you will learn about problem-solving discussions, in which the members of a group collectively attempt to arrive at a single position concerning which in a set of different solutions to a significant problem they wish to endorse by working through a set of questions that constitute an agenda and refraining from moving away from the order of agenda items. There is a logic to taking up issues involved in a collective problem solving effort in a particular order that makes it more likely that the final choice of the group is the best among those they have been able to consider. The assigned reading will be of help in preparing you both for how to approach the task and what to do when performance is not proceeding as it ideally should.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- develop an understanding of problem solving as it occurs in groups.
- be aware of different approaches to group problem solving.
- appreciate group problem solving as a process of inquiry, not advocacy.
- recognize limitations on the effectiveness of group problem solving.
- have competence in completing necessary preparations for participating in a problem-solving discussion.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Chapters 9 and 10 of the textbook.
- Read: Lesson 12 lecture content
- Watch: Teamwork on the Fly video (Time: 00:02:31)

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L13 Overview

Introduction

Lesson 13 has you taking part in a problem-solving discussion, in which your group must establish the problem it wants to solve, identify criteria (e.g., feasibility and cost) for evaluating solutions, generate possible solutions, assess them in light of the criteria, and determine which one, among those under consideration, best satisfies the criteria. In doing this as a group, you and your partners will have acquired valuable experience in how to approach a problem in need of resolution and systematically arrive through discussion at a conclusion concerning which one of the options considered to endorse. You should come to appreciate more fully the virtues of rational choice, as well as some of the limitations on the possibilities for acting in completely rational ways in groups.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- be better equipped to work as a member of a group attempting to find solutions to a problem.
- have greater skill in problem analysis, solution generation, and the evaluation of information pertaining to each.
- be more adept interacting with others in a systematic and organized fashion.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Lesson 13 lecture content

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L14 Overview

Introduction

Although there is no new reading for Lesson 14, it will be good to go back over those portions of Chapters 9 and 10 of the textbook that pertain in particular to decision making in groups. Problem solving is broader in scope than decision making and has groups engaging in discovery of options, whereas in many decision-making situations, according to Gloria Galanes and Katherine Adams, the options are already known. Problem solving comes closest to decision making conceptually for the category of questions of policy. There are three other types of questions, however: questions of fact, conjecture, and value. In Lesson 14, you will need to be able to show an understanding of all four categories by identifying an appropriate example for each, as well as construct an agenda that would be appropriate to use in a group discussion of each type. This lesson is not tied specifically to Lesson 15. However, it can have an impact on how you prepare for it.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- understand decision making as a process of making choices among alternatives.
- know the different types of questions decision-making groups confront.
- appreciate the many sources of influence on decision making as it occurs in groups.
- be more aware of different methods of reaching a decision in groups.
- have more skill in preparing to participate in a decision-making discussion.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Review: Chapter 9 and 10 of the textbook.
- Read: Lesson 14 lecture content.

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.

L15 Overview

Introduction

With Lesson #15, you have reached the end of the course. For it, you and your group will be taking part in a decision-making discussion of a question of fact, conjecture, value, or policy (see the examples and agendas you created in Lesson 14). In this final lesson, by prior agreement, the members of your group will be addressing one of the four types (fact, conjecture, value, or policy) of questions that are suitable for decision-making discussions and will be pursuing the answer in terms of an appropriate agenda that they have also selected on the basis of prior agreement. The objective is to arrive, if possible, at a unified position that the discussion has indicated has the greater merit or strongest warrant.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you should:

- be more adept in formal group decision making.
- develop skill in assessing the merits of alternatives that represent competing answers to a question of fact, conjecture, value, or policy.
- have more capability in using previously acquired knowledge to deal with the task-related and relational problems that can and often do arise in decision-making discussions.
- appreciate how analytical, evaluative, and expressive skills contribute to effective decision making in groups.

Lesson Readings & Activities

- Read: Lesson 15 lecture content.

Assignments

See the Calendar or Syllabus to ensure that you are fully aware of assignment due dates for this lesson.