16

Human Behaviour in Group Settings

16.1 Introduction

When you look around yourself what type of relations do you find? If you are a student, you have friends of your age. If you are a professional then people of different age groups come in contact with you. You are somebody’s parent or brother / sister or friend. All these are examples of social settings in which various groups function. It will be easy for you to think of family as a group. Infact, in any society, family is a basic group. Groups are very important part of our life. During our life time we live in different types of groups. Most of our activities involve groups. Groups have functional value for individuals as well as community and society. People form groups, parties, associations with certain goals. Today, groups as a mode of pursuing our goals, has become a common feature of our social life. In this way groups provides the foundation of our shared human nature. In this lesson we will study about groups and its various features.

16.2 Objectives

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- define group;
- explain how groups are formed and how do they function;
- explain social norms;
- state the effect of group on risk taking behaviour and
- define and distinguish between conformity and compliance.
16.3 Formation of groups and group dynamics

We are born in a group called family. We live in groups of various kinds like peers, friends, professionals and so on throughout our life. We cannot survive without the support of group and cannot realize our goals without group activity. The shaping of our social nature is largely a function of the contributions from various kinds of groups. Groups influence our behaviour in important ways and lead to a number of changes in our behaviour. Many of these changes take place because of our membership to different groups. People want to belong to group and participation in group activities facilitates attainment of different goals.

Let us first see what the term ‘group’ means. A group may be defined as consisting of two or more interacting persons, who share common goals, have a stable i.e. lasting relationship and are somehow interdependent and perceive that they are part of a group.

Let us examine this definition more closely.

First, the definition suggests that to be a part of a group, individuals must interact with one another, either directly or indirectly. Second, individuals who form the group must share at least some goals that they all seek to attain. Third, their relationship must be relatively stable. It must persist over appreciable period of time. Fourth, they must be interdependent in some manner – what happens to one affects others. Finally, the group members must recognize that they are part of a group.

All these conditions are necessary and important before a collectivity of several persons can be described as a group. Some groups consist of persons who have worked together for long periods of time. Also, there are groups in which persons have only a fleeting relationship with one another. For example passengers in a train / bus stay together for a few hours. Our play teams form a group, but we all know that they last only till we remain in that neighbourhood. The same is true for many other groups.

16.4 Group Formation : Why do People Join Groups

Think of all the groups you have ever joined: clubs, associations, religious group, and informal groups consisting of people with whom you hang out. Why did you join them in the first place? The answer may involve several different reasons.

First, groups help us to satisfy important psychological and social needs. For instance they fulfill the need for giving and receiving attention and affection, or for a sense of belonging.

Second, groups help us to achieve goals that we could not attain by working alone. By working with others, we can often perform tasks, we could not accomplish ourselves.
Third, group members often provide us with knowledge and information that we could not otherwise attain, or could gain only with difficulty.

Fourth, groups help meet our needs for security; in many cases, there is safety in numbers, especially if we happen to live in a dangerous urban environment.

Finally, group membership also contributes to a positive social identity – it becomes part of our self concept.

16.5 How Groups Function?

It is clear from the above discussion that groups often exert powerful effects upon their members. How precisely do groups affect their members? In this context four aspects of a group play very important role.

(a) **Roles : Differentiation of functions within groups**

In a group, different persons perform different tasks and are expected to accomplish different goals. In short, they play different roles. Sometimes, roles are assigned. For instance, a group may select different individuals to serve as its leader, treasurer and secretary.

(b) **Status : The Prestige of Various Roles**

Status refers to the social standing or rank within a group. Different roles or positions in a group are often associated with different levels of status. People are often extremely sensitive to this fact, because status is often linked to a wide range of desirable outcomes, such as salary and ‘perks’.

(c) **Cohesiveness : The Force That Binds**

Cohesiveness refers to all the forces that cause members to remain in the group, including factors such as liking for other members. It involves desire to maintain the group or belongingness to the group.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 16.1**

Read the following statements and indicate whether they are true or false.

1. Groups emerge when people interact with each other.
2. Groups goals can be achieved individually.
3. Status refers to the prestige associated with different roles in a group.
4. Groups do not contribute to our social identity.
5. Cohesiveness among group members increases belongingness.
16.5 Social Norms

A norm refers to any pattern of behaviour that is ‘typical’ or ‘representative’ of a group or a society. Hence, a social norm indicates any pattern of behaviour that occurs so often within a particular society that it comes to be accepted as reflective of that society and taken as ‘sanctioned’ by the members of that society or group.

In a social setting, there are both explicit and unspoken rules indicating how we should or ought to behave. These rules, or social norms, are both detailed and precise. For instance, governments generally function through constitutions and written laws, and athletic contests are usually regulated by written rules. Signs in many public places, for example, along highways, in parks, at airports explicitly describe expected behaviour as in SPEED LIMIT 55, NO SWIMMING, NO PARKING and KEEP OFF THE GRASS.

In contrast, other norms are unspoken or implicit. Most of us obey such unwritten rules in childhood as ‘Do not talk to strangers’. Similarly, we are often influenced by current and rapidly changing standards of dress, speech and grooming. Regardless of whether social norms are explicit or implicit, one fact is very clear: Most people obey them most of the time. For example while leaving the restaurant a tip for the waiter. Similarly virtually everyone, regardless of personal political beliefs, stands when the national anthem of the country is played.

Types of Social Norm: What we should do versus what we actually do

Social norms, as we have already seen, can be formal or informal in nature – as different as rules printed on large signs and informal guidelines such as ‘do not litter’, ‘to keep your city clean’. However, this is not the only way in which norms differ. Another important distinction is made between descriptive norms and injunctive norms. Descriptive norms are ones simply indicating what most people do in a given situation. They influence behaviour by informing us about what is generally seen as effective behaviour in that particular situation. In contrast, inductive norms specify what ought to be done – what is the approved or disapproved behaviour in a given situation. Both kinds of norms can exert strong effects upon behaviour. However, in certain situations, especially ones in which antisocial behaviour (behaviour not approved of by a given group or society) is and its inductive norms may exert somewhat stonger effect.

Efforts to change people’s behaviour should focus on activating the type of norms that are most likely to succeed. In a situation when most people already behave in a pro-social manner, calling their attention to this fact-activating a descriptive norm and so reminding people of how they should behave may prove more effective.

16.6 The Development of Norms

In the group situation, people gradually formulate or set certain group norms. That is, all members of a group come to make their judgments within a restricted range that is characteristic of that group. Thus in each group the individual norms are very much alike, though these norms vary a great deal from group to group.
Norm building of kind mentioned above constantly occurs in our everyday life. For example, people who live where the air is clear and dry learn to judge mountain as being 30, 40 or 50 miles distant, whereas people who come from regions where visibility is not so high would judge the same mountains 6, 8, 10 miles away. Not all norms are of this nature; we also learn to judge things in terms of “what kind?” For example, we judge some forms of social behaviour as being matters of morality, and others as only matters of “taste”. The same principles seem to apply to both kinds of norms. These principles as applied to group norms, depend upon the fact that people are not only responding to the things about which they build up norms but are also responding to each other.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 16.2**

State whether the following statements are True or False

1. Typical behaviours of a group reveals norms of that group.
2. Norms may not be sanctioned by the group members.
3. What most people do is a statement of descriptive norm.
4. Injuctive norms till what one is expected to do.
5. Norms are found similar across different group.

**16.7 Effect of Group on Performance and Risk Taking**

Groups affect individual performance either in terms of facilitation or inhibition. Sometimes when we perform a task, we work totally alone. For instance, you might study in your hostel room while your roommate sleeps or also studies. In still other cases, we work on tasks together with other persons, as part of a task performing group or a team. The effects of other persons on our performance in these various setting seems to vary as a function of our relationship with the persons participating as group members.

Performance is facilitated in many cases in the presence of others. Imagine that you are a young athlete, an ice skater. You are preparing for your first important competition. You practice your routines alone for several hours each day, month after month. Finally, on the final day, you skate out onto the ice in a huge arena filled with the biggest crowd, you have ever seen. Will your performance be better or worse than when you practiced alone? It has been found that participants performed better when working in the presence of others than when working alone. Even for a complex task – one requiring high levels of thought, performance is found to increase when individuals worked in groups.

Imagine that you are performing some task alone. Then several other persons arrive on the scene and begin to watch you intently. Will your pulse beat quicker because of the presence of this audience? Informal experience suggests that it may – that the present of other personas in the form of an interested audience can increase our arousal level. When arousal
increases, our tendency to perform the dominant responses – the ones we are most likely to perform in a given situation – rises. Such dominant responses, in turn, can be correct or incorrect for that situation. If they are incorrect your performance goes down. When they are correct ones your performance goes up.

**Social Loafing : Letting others do the work when part of a group**

Suppose that you and few others are helping a friend to move. In order to lift the heaviest pieces of furniture, you all pitch in. Will all of the people helping exert equal effort? Probably not. Some will take as much of the load as they can, while others will simply hang on, perhaps grunting loudly in order to pretend that they are helping more than they actually are.

This pattern is quite common in situations where groups perform what are known as additive tasks – tasks in which the contributions of all members are combined into a single group output. On such tasks, some persons work hard while others goof off, doing less than their share and less than they might do if asked to work alone. Social psychologists call these effects as social loafing – reduction in motivation and effort that occur when people work collectively in a group compared to when they work individually as independent co-actors. Social loafing appears among both males and females, and among children as well as adults.

Social loafing is a pervasive fact of social life. Why does such effects occur? And, what steps can be taken to reduce their occurrence? Many different explanations for social loafing have been proposed. For example, one reason is diffusion of responsibility. According to some researchers as group size increases each member feels less and less responsible for the task being performed. As a result each person exerts decreasing effort. In contrast, others have focused on the fact that in groups, members’ motivation decreases because they realize that their contributions cannot be evaluated individually – so why work hard?

Perhaps the most comprehensive explanation of social loafing offered to date is that collective effort model. This model suggests that social loafing can be understood by extending a basic theory of individual motivation. It says that individuals will work hard on a given task only to the extent that the following conditions exist : (a) they believe that working hard will lead to better performance; (b) they believe that better performance will be recognized and rewarded and (c) the rewards available are ones they value and desire. In other words, individuals working alone will exert effort only to the extent that they perceive direct links between hard work and the outcomes they want.

It has been observed that these links often appear weaker when individuals work together in groups than when they work alone. First, one may look at expectancy. This may be high when individuals work alone, but lower when they work together in groups, because
people realize that other factors aside from their own effort will determine the group’s performance. Similarly, instrumentality may also be weaker when people work together in groups. They realize that valued outcomes are divided among all group members. As a result, they may not get their fair share given their level of effort. Because there is greater uncertainty about the links between how hard people work and the rewards they receive, social loafing occurs.

**Risk Taking**: We are often asked to work under conditions of uncertainty. We need to take risk. In this context a question arises. Will a person take more risk while working individually or in group. There have been many studies which have addressed this problem. Earlier it was found that people take greater risk when they are asked to decide in groups situations. More recent studies tell that there is polarization in the decision in group situation. It may become more risky or less risky depending on the direction of polarization.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 16.3**

State whether the following statements are True or False:

1. On a well learned task people’s performance increases in the presence of others.
2. The presence of audience always has negative effect on performance.
3. Social loafing refers to a situation when members of group put in less effort in performing group’s task.
4. When there are many people to work, the group members feel greater responsibility.
5. The expectancy of reward and instrumentality in achieving the reward influence the occurrence of social loafing.
6. Individual decision making gets polarized in group settings.

**16.8 Value Pattern : Basic Values of Life**

Civilization is a relatively high level of cultural and technological development, and to civilize is to bring about a technically advanced and rationally ordered stage of cultural development. Using their superior brain power, human beings have developed over many centuries, civilizations that enable them to control their environment and to live in relative comfort and security. Civilization is a system of norms and rules that regulate the behaviour of the people so to guarantee its smooth functioning and progress. Societal norms are in essence compromises that balance society, preventing a situation in which a few can freely satisfy all their needs at the expense of all others.

Values represent transformation of societal norms, redefined in moral terms and internalized by the individual members of society. To murder or to steal might not have been bad originally. But if such acts are permitted without sanction, they may hamper the effective
functioning of human civilization. When the prohibition against murdering or stealing becomes sanctified and internalized by individuals, it constitutes a value (the value of human life or of human property). Thus values represent statement of desirable standards of conduct endorsed by a society or community.

Human cultures have developed through the progressive construction and application of a system of functional norms. The law in modern society is one reflection of these norms, while the internalization of these norms is reflected in the value system. The more successful society becomes in a socialization of value orientation, the less it needs to police its citizens in maintaining these norms. This becomes possible because people become self-directed by being value oriented.

The process of socialization involves both learning and more globally education. Learning refers to the acquisition of specific knowledge and intellectual attainments, while education refers to the acquisition of values and a value orientation. In early socialization, specific behaviours must be taught. But as people grow, they are expected to internalize the standards and form a system of values. A value guides behaviour in a variety of concrete situations that have not been experienced before. For example, young children are specifically taught to behave honestly in concrete situations. Later they are expected to abstract honesty as a value that directs the future course of behaviour. Attaining a value orientation makes the person self-directed acting in a functionally effective and civilized way.

Values are central and influential in all areas of human life and most of the every day behaviour reflects underlying values, usually even without the conscious awareness of their holders. Values are expressed choices about how to behave in particular situations, in order or priorities, and in the ways people think about their behaviour. If you stopped for a minute to scrutinize one day in your life, you would probably be surprised to discover the great array of underlying values that would emerge as relevant to that day’s behaviours.

Values are centrally located within a person’s total belief system. They are abstract ideals or generalized beliefs not tied directly to a specific attitude, object or situation. Examples of values include truth, beauty, freedom, thrift, responsibility, duty and order.

16.9 Conformity and Compliance

Have you ever found yourself in a situation in which you felt that you stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb? If so, you have already had direct experience with pressures toward conformity. In such situations, you probably experienced a strong desire to ‘get back into line’ or in other words, to fit in with other people around you.

Such pressures toward conformity stem from the fact that in many contexts, we behave according to unwritten or unspoken rules, also known as social norms, as discussed earlier in this lesson. At first glance, there is a strong tendency towards conformity, i.e. toward
going along with our society’s or our group’s expectations and about how we should behave in various situations.

In many situations, conformity serves many useful functions. In other situations, though, norms governing individual behaviour appear to have little, if any, practical value, they simply exist. For example, in some settings, especially in the business world, many companies even today, require that their male employees wear neckties. But, wearing such clothing is unrelated to the performance of many jobs and may cause considerable discomfort, like wearing a tie on a sunny day in summers. So, such norms may have outlived their usefulness.

There are various factors which determine that extent to which individuals yield to conformity pressure or resist it. The most important ones among them are conformity and cohesiveness. When cohesiveness is high or when we like and admire some persons, pressures toward conformity are magnified. When cohesiveness is low the pressures toward conformity are also low. It has also been found that conformity tends to increase with group size up to eight group members and beyond. So, it appears that the larger the group, the greater our tendency to go along with it, even if this means behaving in ways different from the ones we would really prefer.

**The Desire To Be Liked : Normative Social Influence**

How can we get others to like us? One of the most unsuccessful ways is to appear to be as similar to others as possible. From our earliest days, we learn that agreeing with the person around us, and behaving as they do, causes them to like you. Parents, teachers, friends and others often heap praise and approval on us for showing such familiarity. We have learned that doing so can help us win the approval or acceptance we crave. This source of conformity is known as normative social influence because it leads us to alter our behaviour to meet others’ expectations.

The above mentioned influence can be powerful indeed. For instance, if individuals learn that others they admire or with whom they identify hold views different from their own, they do not simply change what they say in order to “fit in”. In addition, they often reinterpret the view expressed by these other persons so that they can find these views more acceptable. In other words, they do considerable cognitive work in order to be able to accept these views privately as well as to endorse them publicly.

**The Desire To Be Right : Informational Social Influence**

How can we establish the accuracy of our political or social views or decide what hairstyle suits us best? There are no simple physical tests or measuring devices to answer these questions. To answer such questions, therefore, we refer to other people. We use their opinions and actions as guides for our own. Our reliance on others, in turn, is often a powerful source of the tendency to conform. Other people’s actions and opinions define social reality for us, and we use these as guide for our own actions and opinions. This
derives its power from our tendency to depend on others as a source of information about many aspects of the social world.

**Compliance**

Compliance means getting others say yes to your requests. There are certain techniques for gaining compliance which people use. Some of these are:

a. **Friendship and liking**: Generally we are more willing to comply with requests from friends or from people we like than with requests from strangers or people we do not like.

b. **Commitment and consistency**: Once we have committed ourselves to a position or action, we are more willing to comply with requests for behaviours that are consistent with this position or action. We do not accede to requests that are inconsistent with it.

c. **Scarcity**: We value or try to secure outcomes or objects that are scarce or decreasing in their availability. As a result, we are more likely to comply with requests that focus on scarcity rather than those that make no reference to this issue.

d. **Reciprocity**: We are generally more willing to comply with a request from someone who has previously provided a favour or concession to us than to oblige someone who has not. In other words, we feel impelled to pay people back in some way for what they have done for us.

e. **Social Validation**: We are generally more willing to comply with a request for some action if this action is consistent with what we believe persons similar to ourselves are doing (or thinking). We want to be correct, and one way to be so is to act and think like others.

f. **Authority**: In general, we are more willing to comply with requests from someone who holds legitimate authority or who simply appears to do so.

These six basic principles underline many techniques that we use for gaining compliance from others.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 16.4**

State whether the following statements are True or False.

1. Values guide our behaviours.
2. Values are latent choices about how to behave.
3. We go along with a group to win approval.
4. Social reality is defined by personal actions and opinions.
5. Obligations and need for reciprocity increase compliance.
16.10 What you have learnt

- Groups influence our behaviour in important ways and lead to a number of changes in our behaviour.

- A group may be defined as consisting of two or more interacting persons, who share common goals, have a stable i.e. lasting relationship and are somehow interdependent and perceive that they are part of a group.

- Groups help us to satisfy important psychological and social needs.

- Groups help us to achieve goals that we could not attain by working alone.

- Group members often provide us with knowledge and information that we could not otherwise attain, or could gain only with difficulty.

- In a group, different persons perform different tasks and are expected to accomplish different goals.

- Status refers to the social standing or rank within a group.

- Cohesiveness refers to all the forces that cause members to remain in the group, including factors such as liking for other members.

- A norm refers to any pattern of behaviour that is ‘typical’ or ‘representative’ of a group or a society.

- In a social setting, there are both explicit and unspoken rules indicating how we should or ought to behave.

- Groups affect individual performance either in terms of facilitation or inhibition.

- Social loafing – reduction in motivation and effort that occur when people work collectively in a group compared to when they work individually as independent co-actors. Social loafing appears among both males and females, and among children as well as adults.

- Societal norms are in essence compromises that balance society, preventing a situation in which a few can freely satisfy all their needs at the expense of all others.

- Values represent transformation of societal norms, redefined in moral terms and internalized by the individual members of society.

- Values are centrally located within a person’s total belief system.
16.11 Terminal Exercises

1. Define a group and indicate reasons for joining a group.
2. What is a norm? How do they develop?
3. Distinguish between social facilitation and social loafing.
4. Define compliance and describe three factors which contribute to development of compliance.

Answers to Intext Questions

16.1

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True

16.2

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. True
5. False

16.3

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. True

16.4

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True