

## Introduction to Groups



**The processes and behaviours that happen in groups are often referred to as group dynamics.**

**Group dynamics can influence the way groups make decisions, help or hinder the way people learn new skills, and contribute to the way people view those who are different from them.**

These processes and behaviours vary from group to group and at different times in the same group. An understanding of group dynamics can help you consciously manage some of the issues that arise in collectives and co-operatives.

This briefing is mainly a pointer to other Rhizome briefings that explore different aspects of groups in more detail.



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### Diversity

There is diversity in every group, however similar people appear to be. Our understandings, assumptions and approaches to that diversity will affect the functioning of the group, its development and its impact. Take our language and ways of communicating about or with diversity as an example. Language that is likely to be considered appropriate in some times and places, could be considered inappropriate, even offensive, in other times and places. This might be true even with the same group.

In groups there is often a mainstream group – people perceived to be in the centre of the organisation. The mainstream may appear to be friends, or be people who appear to think or behave in similar ways. People outside this group – in the margins – may feel lonely, or angry, for example. They may try to join the mainstream group, adapt to those group norms, or resign themselves to being in a marginalised position. They may link up with other outsiders. People in some margins may never bother to join the group in the first place.

### Conflict

Conflict is usually defined as two or more people having a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one. At source, our conflicts may be due to how we deal with our diversity, the way we understand or communicate those differences, and how they affect us.

It can feel difficult to be involved in a conflict, and difficult to see conflict happening. Emotions can be triggered that may interfere with our ability to understand each other, or respond appropriately.

On the other hand, conflict is a natural part of group life, and can help uncover interpersonal dynamics and crucial concerns. Conflict can be creative and productive when people share an understanding of what group dynamics may be occurring and what lies beneath conflicts.

## Active Listening

Active listening is a key skill for trainers, facilitators and everyone involved in groups. More than that, active listening is a state of mind that we can work towards. When we're in the right state of mind, active listening enables us to:

- Really hear what is being said and what is not being said
- Hear underlying issues before they escalate and cause disruption
- Stay in tune with a person or a group's needs and expectations
- Ensure that everyone feels a valued and respected part of the coaching, mediation, meeting or training process.



## Framing and Weather Reporting

Framing is setting the context and direction for a discussion. It sets boundaries to the discussion, in the same way that a picture frame marks the limits of the picture. Framing can also be used with active listening throughout a meeting or training session to reflect on what is (you perceive to be) happening in the group.

While Active listening is commonly focused on listening to one person, to clarify what an individual speaker is saying, it's equally useful in listening to what's happening in an entire group, then reporting on it to help move the group on. This is sometimes called 'weather reporting'.

## Consensus decision-making

A consensus decision is one that everyone involved can agree to; it may not be their first choice, but it is something to which they can all consent. This notion is more difficult than it sounds. When politicians and journalists speak of a consensus emerging around an important issue, they are often talking not about consensus, but rather a 'significant majority'. At the other end, often a group of friends will come to a consensus about where to go or what film to see, without using the term.

## Facilitation

Facilitation – making things easier – uses a range of participatory attitudes and behaviours that bring people together to collaborate in a supportive environment and to make good and effective decisions. There are a variety of ways that a meeting can be facilitated. Rhizome has developed a simple core process which can be adapted to suit different situations.

## Facilitating Difficult Behaviour in Groups

At some point every group encounters people who are behaving in a way that the rest of the group find challenging. It can cause strong reactions and throw the group off course. Dealing with difficult behaviour doesn't have to be stressful. With a little bit of understanding of what's going on in the group or for the individuals and then using a few simple tools, issues can be successfully resolved.

## Conducting a mediation

Sometimes conflict reaches the point where mediation - a formal process of dispute resolution - rather than facilitation is required. As with the previous topics, Rhizome has developed a straightforward core process that can be adapted to different situations.