Organizational Work Group Behaviour and Implications for Managers in Organizations

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Abstract

Individuals seldom, if ever, behave without being influenced by the groups they belong to. Most people spend the majority of their lives involved with family groups, social groups, professional groups, and work groups, among others. Individual success depends on the ability to function effectively within groups. A group is two or more people with a common relationship. Thus, a group could be coworkers, or people meeting for lunch or standing at the bus-stop. This literature review work examines issues bordering on organizational group behaviour and implications for managers in organizations. The study concluded that every group develops sets of values and norms that regulate the behaviour of individual members in areas importance to the group process. The research also recommended among others that effective managers should develop productive working relationships with groups.

Key Words: Organization, Managers, Group, Behaviour, Individual, Employee, and Work.

Introduction

History is crowded with instances of individual achievement. Most meaningful work, however, is not accomplished by individuals working alone, but by people working together to achieve common goals (Okere, 2013). In work organizations, people may be placed in formal, structured relationships with specific areas of authority and responsibility. There are also the ever-present informal relationships derived from friendship, physical proximity, common interest, common assignments, or similar values (Costley and Ralp, 1987). All organizations include both formal and informal groups. Sometimes, strong, informal ties weld the formal organization into a cohesive force. Other times, groups within larger groups, frequently known as cliques, can be divisive and counterproductive. Groups, with their own internal norms, role conflicts, and status relationships, are the subject of this work. An understanding of group processes is important in dealing with human behaviour in an organization. Since we are all involved in groups, understanding group processes is also important in functioning effectively as individuals. All organizations involve interrelationships among groups within the organization and with groups in other organizations (Costley and Ralph, 1987).

Most people belong to several groups. Groups have a major effect on individual behaviour while the individual is interacting in the group. This effect carries over when the individual is outside the group. But individuals may behave differently when they are involved in group activities than when they are functioning on their own (Dennis and Thomas, 1986). To increase the complexity of the relationship between individual behaviour and groups, it has been observed that the same individual may change behaviour patterns when involved in different groups. According to Rodney and Matti (1985), most people probably under-estimate the degree to which their behaviour is affected by the groups they belong to. The chance for individuals to assume leadership roles is much greater in small-group situations. Few individuals will ever have the chance to be top-level managers or executives of large organizations. But most people will assume a variety of leadership positions in different types of small groups during their lives (Okere, 2013). Even those individuals who become executives of large organizations find that their critical leadership roles depend on their ability to work in small groups. An organization involves a number of small groups that are linked together to achieve organizational objectives (Rodney and Matti, 1985).

Thus, a group can be described as two or more individuals working together to achieve a common goal. Any definition of a group process necessarily involves face-to-face interaction and communication among individuals as a basic component (Costley and Ralp, 1987). As individuals interact to achieve goals, status relationships inevitably

develop, which is a necessary element in any group situation. Possibly the most discussed characteristics of groups are their norms and values. Every group develops sets of values and norms that regulate the behaviour of individual members in areas important to the group process (Marvin 1976).

Distinction Between Togetherness Situations and Group Process

Phillip and Curtis (1986) described togetherness situations as temporary associations in which individuals interact. There are no prolonged, stable status and role relationships among the individuals. No sets of values or norms extend beyond the particular situation. In togetherness situations, the nature of the immediate task or problem is the only effect on the behaviour of the individuals involved. On the other hand, group situations exist when individuals participate as members of a group structure. Specific status relationships indicate each member's authority and responsibility within the group. Role relationships define the areas of activity that are appropriate for each member of the group. A set of shared norms defines the acceptable behaviours in the process of achieving objectives that involve the group.

Relationships and Development of Groups

The most important relationships as explained by James and Charles (1986) center on the development of status, roles, and norms. These relationships develop and stabilize as a group defines its objectives and develops methods of rewarding and punishing group members for their behaviours.

Status: Status refers to an individual's relative position or rank in a group. Basic to the concept of status is the comparison of group members according to their value to the group. The evaluation of a person's rank is usually based on the extent to which the individual is able to influence the achievement of group objectives and meet the needs of group members.

Status is often classified as either formal or informal (Costley and Ralph, 1987). Formal status is the "official" rank of an individual, as designed by an organization. The position of a general manager indicates a formal status designation by the organization. Informal status refers to the social position or rank of an individual as a result of the evaluation of others in a group. A group of employees may look for advice and leadership from an individual who has no formal management position but has been accorded informal status by the group. Both formal and informal status have an impact on the behaviour of individuals in an organization.

Roles: Shakesper said, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players" (Nancy and Stephen, 2007). By this term, we mean a set of expected behaviour patterns of a person in a given position in a social unit. The understanding of role behaviour would be dramatically simplified if each of us chose one role and "played it out regularly and consistently. Unfortunately, we are required to play a number of diverse roles, both on and off our jobs. In formal organizations, job or position descriptions usually define behavioural expectations. In most group situations, role expectations are developed by the group members. In many situations, the most important role expectations are never written. They develop as a result of experience on the job. All members of a group develop a definition of the role they believe they are expected to assume and the roles that other members of the group should assume. The roles played by each are compatible; some create conflicts.

Role Conflict: Most roles are governed by role expectations that is, how others believe a person should act in a given situation. When an individual is confronted by conflicting role expectations, the result is role conflict. Role conflict exists when an individual finds that complying with one role requirement may make it more difficult to comply with another (Peterson et al, 1995). At the extreme, it can include situations in which two or more role expectations are mutually contradictory.

Role Ambiguity: Role ambiguity exists when a person is unclear about the expectations of his or her role. In groups, role ambiguity can lead to confusion, stress, and even bad feelings. For instance, suppose two group members each think the other one is responsible for preparing the first draft of a report. At the next meeting, neither brings a draft report and both are annoyed that the other person did not do the work. Groups benefit when individuals know their roles. Roles within groups should be balanced. Schein (1980) suggest that role overload occurs when what is expected of a person far exceeds what he or she is able to do. Role overload occurs when too little is expected of someone and that person feels that he or she is not contributing to the group.

Thus, individuals in organizations are involved in carrying out a number of roles in meeting organizational responsibilities. The individual's formal role responsibilities include relating to others in the organization's chain of command, the authority associated with a position, the specific function required by a position, the formal status in the organization, and the decision making responsibility (Costley and Ralph, 1987).

Norms: Organizational group norms are the values that group members hold concerning acceptable behaviours in specific situations (Peterson et al, 1995). The group norms are the

ideal behaviours expected of group members. The norms specify what individuals should do, not necessarily how they actually behave. Norms apply only to those situations that are most important to the group; they do not cover all possible behaviours in every situation. Thus, norms are acceptable standards of behaviour within a group that are shared by the group's members. All groups have established norms that tell members what they ought and ought not to do under certain circumstances. When agreed to and accepted by the group, norms act as a means of influencing the behaviour of group members with a minimum of external controls. Norms differ among groups, communities, and societies, but all of these entities have a norms (Hackman, 1992). Formalized norms are written up in organizational manuals that set out rules and procedures, for employees to follow. But by far, most norms in organizations are informal.

From Individual to Group or Team Member

In order for either a group or a team to function, individuals have to achieve some balance between their own needs and the needs of the group. When individuals come together to form groups and teams, they bring with them their personalities and all their previous experiences. They also bring their tendencies to act in different ways at different times, depending on the effects that different situations and different people have on them (Booth, 1994).

Effects of Group Norms

1. **Norms Direct Behaviour:** In the words of Pearce and Peters (1985), most groups will develop sets norms that they find useful in directing the behaviour of individuals toward achieving the objectives of the group. These norms may become powerful in standardizing the behaviour of group members. Individuals who do not behave in accordance with the norms are usually subjected to group pressure to force their behaviour within the acceptable range of the norm.

2. **Conformity to Norms:** Obtaining conformity to group norms is important if the group is to function effectively and maintain the commitment of its members. A group establishes itself and develops its identify by members conforming to group norms. Groups are often referred to by the characteristics reflected by their norms (David et al, 1985).

3. **Norms Affect Productivity:** The norms of work groups can have a powerful effect on productivity. Individual levels of work are almost always affected by group norms and the pressures to conform to them. Those who work above the norm in industry are usually referred to as rate-busters and are often subjected to severe group pressure to reduce

output. In some situations union members are charged by fellow workers with "working too hard". Alvin et al (2008) opined those cases have occurred in which individuals were fined or suspended from a union for working at speeds above a normal standard provided in a contract with an employer. Norms may be established by a work group as a means of achieving job security goals, avoiding extra work, and obtaining better working conditions or other benefits. James and Charles (1986) said, "one way to encourage group norms that support high output is to minimize employee-management antagonism deliberately, perhaps by involving employees more in the decision-making process".

Development of Norms

Feldman (1984) and Bettenhausen and Murnighan (1991) observed that norms typically develop naturally as group members learn what behaviours are necessary for the team to function effectively. Of course, critical events in the group might short circuit the process and quickly prompt new norms. Most norms develop in one or more of the following four ways:

1. Explicit statements made by a group member. Often instructions from the group's supervisor or a powerful member establish norms.
2. Critical events in the group's history. These set important precedents. A bystander is injured while standing too close to a machine and, from that point on, members of the work group regularly monitor each other to ensure that no one other than the operator gets within two meters of any machine.
3. Primacy. The first behaviour patterns that emerges in a group frequently sets team expectations.
4. Cary-over behaviours from past situations. Group members bring expectations with them from other groups to which they have belonged. Thus, work groups typically prefer to add new members who are similar to current ones in background and experience.

This is likely to increase the probability that the expectations they bring are consistent with those already held by the group.

Importance of Norms

Groups do not establish or enforce norms for every conceivable situation, however. The norms that the groups will enforce tend to be those that are important to them (Feldman 1984; Bettenhausen and Murnighan, 1991). What makes a norm important?

1. It facilitates the group's survival.
2. It increases the predictability of group members behaviours.

3. It reduces embarrassing interpersonal problems for group members.
4. It allows members to express the central values of the group and clarify what is distinctive about the groups identify.

Work Groups Becoming Teams

Work groups become teams when they meet the following conditions (Katzenback and Smith, 1999):

1. Team members share leadership.
2. Both individuals and the team as a whole share accountability for the work of the team.
3. The team develops its own purpose or mission.
4. The team works on problem-solving continuously, rather than just at scheduled meeting times.
5. The team's measure of effectiveness is the team's outcomes and goals, not individual outcomes and goals.

Types of Teams

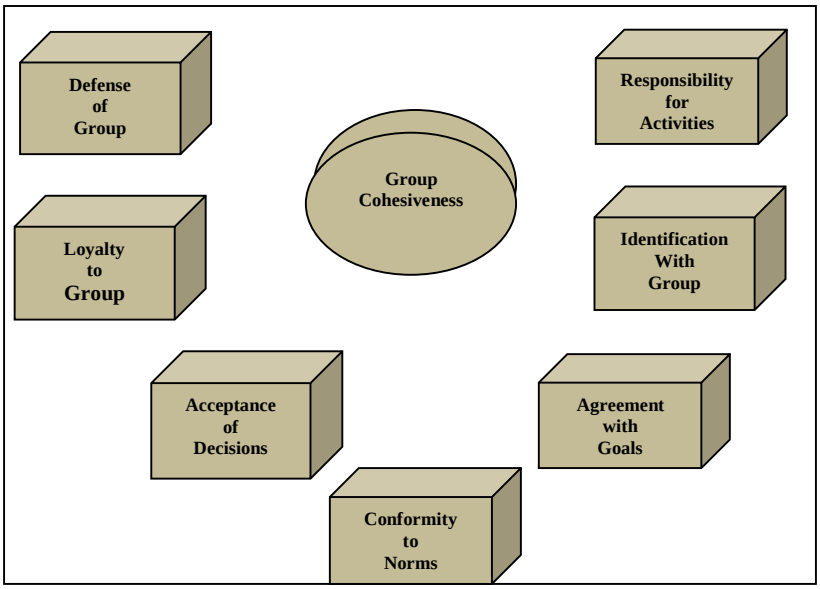
Teams can be classified based on their objective. The four most kinds of teams are:

1. Problem-solving or process-improvement teams;
2. Self-managed or self-directed teams;
3. Cross-functional or project teams;
4. Virtual teams.

Organizational Group Cohesiveness

Cohesiveness refers to the amount of unity in the group and the degree to which members are pulling in the same direction. The cohesiveness of a group results from the attraction of the group for its members. Attraction depends on the need satisfaction that results from membership. Individuals join groups to satisfy needs, if the group's ability to satisfy individual need's decreases, the effectiveness of the group will decrease (Roos and Starke, 1980). Thus, group cohesiveness is reflected in the attitudes and actions of the members. According to Steve (1986), the following factors are often used as cohesiveness indicators: loyalty to the group, defense of the group, responsibility for group activities, identification with the group, acceptance of group decisions, conformity to group norms, and agreement with group goals. This is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Indicators of Group Cohesiveness



Source: Costley and Ralph (1987)

To contribute to group activities and conform to group norms, the individual may be required to change personal objectives or methods of satifying needs. As a result, members frequently develop goals that are consistent with essential group activities (Cartwright and Zander, 1998). Changes occur in society that affects the role of groups in satisfying individual needs. During high unemployment, individuals may join groups that they believe will help maintain employment. For example, an employee might join a union. An individual who has lost status in the community may be attracted to a group because of its prestige. Employees may desire to belong to a group that includes managers because they believe that it would give them higher status (Costley and Ralph, 1987). Association with the members of the group may be a major factor in group attraction. An individual may join the group to satisfy social needs for belonging and friendship. If the individuals in the group are primarily satisfying social needs, the other goals and activities of the group may be unimportant. The cohesiveness of some groups can be attributed to the desire of group members to be with each other (Costley and Ralph, 1987). Groups may be attractive because they help in attaining goals that are outside the group itself. In this type of situation, the individual's needs are not satisfied by the achievement of the group's goals. For example, a manager may join the country club because the prestige of membership may help in obtaining a promotion. The manager's promotion is not a goal of the country

club, but the manager sees value in membership because it helps meet needs outside the group (Costley and Ralph, 1987).

Conditions to Increasing Organizational Group Cohesiveness

Peter and Walter (1984), observed that the following conditions usually result in the effectiveness of the group increasing cohesiveness.:

1. The group becomes more attractive for individuals who gain prestige or status within the group.
2. Cohesiveness is higher when group members are in cooperative relationships than when there is internal competition.
3. When group members can fulfill more needs through participation in the group, the attraction of the group increases.
4. An increase in the prestige or status of the group in an organization or in the community usually results in increased attention for group members.
5. When the group is attacked from the outside, the cohesiveness usually increases as the members deal with the external threat.

Thus, to increase the attractiveness of a group, the group must be made to better serve the needs of the group members. A group will be more cohesive if it satisfies the needs for recognition and achievement, the more cooperative the relationships, the freer the communication and the greater the security provided for members.

Conditions to Decreasing Group Cohesiveness

Although the behaviour of groups is complex and difficult to predict accurately, the following conditions as posit by Peter and Walter (1984) usually result in the cohesiveness of the group decreasing:

1. When interpersonal conflict results from members' disagreements over ways to achieving group goals or solve group problems, the effectiveness of the group will decrease.
2. If participation in the group results in unpleasant experiences for an individual, the attractiveness of the group will decrease.
3. If membership places limits on the individuals' participation in other activities or groups outside the group, cohesiveness may be lowered.
4. If conditions exist in the group that prevent or restrict effective communication, cohesiveness will decrease.
5. The cohesiveness may be reduced if group members believe the activities involve too great a personal risk.

6. If the evaluation of the group by outsiders who are respected becomes negative, this can result in the group becoming unattractive to its members.

Results of Organizational Group Cohesiveness

David (1984), discussed that the results of organizational group cohesiveness include:

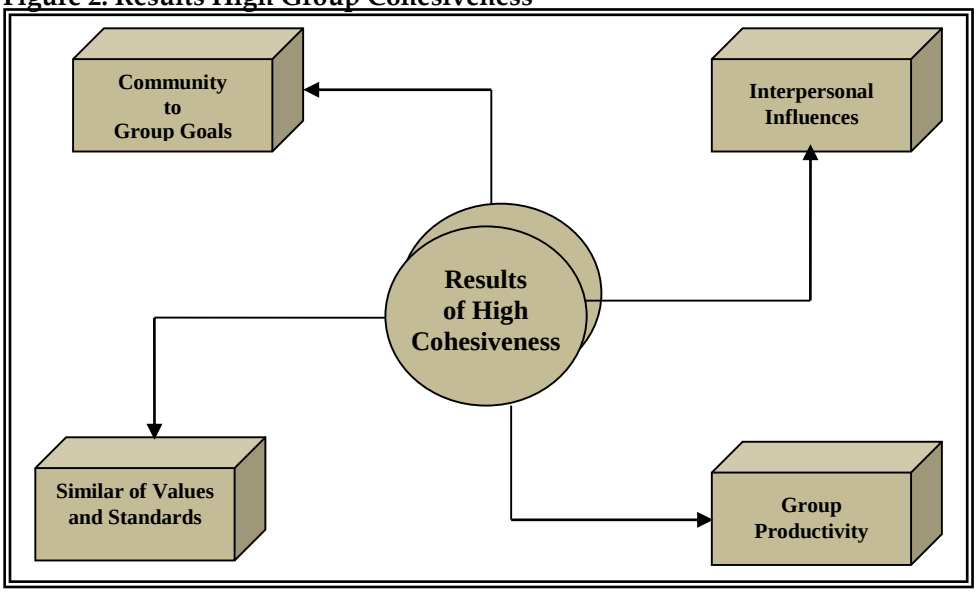
1. **Commitment to Group Goals:** Members who are highly attracted to a group tend to assume more responsibility for the achievement of objectives.
2. **Interpersonal Influence:** Highly cohesive groups are able to more effectively influence the behaviour of group members.
3. **Similarity of Values and Standards:** Where there is strong member attraction to the group, there is usually close agreement on group standards.
4. **Group Productivity:** Highly cohesive group usually have specific expectations of how much each member should contribute to group productivity.

Organizational Group Pressure

Richard (1981) observed that to obtain conformity with norms, organizational groups exert pressure on members. At the most basic level, they reward members who behave in accordance with group norms and punish those that do not contribute to achieving objectives. In most organizations, individuals become members of work groups composed of individuals who work on the same project, in the same department, or in the same area.

Most work groups have specific norms relating to work behaviour, including norms regulating the quantity and quality of productivity expected of productivity expected from individuals. When individual output is above or below that expected by the group, pressure is usually applied by the group to bring the individual into line. According to David (1984), norms generally are enforced only for behaivours that are viewed as important to most group members. Groups do not have the time or energy to regulate each and every action of individual members.

Figure 2: Results High Group Cohesiveness

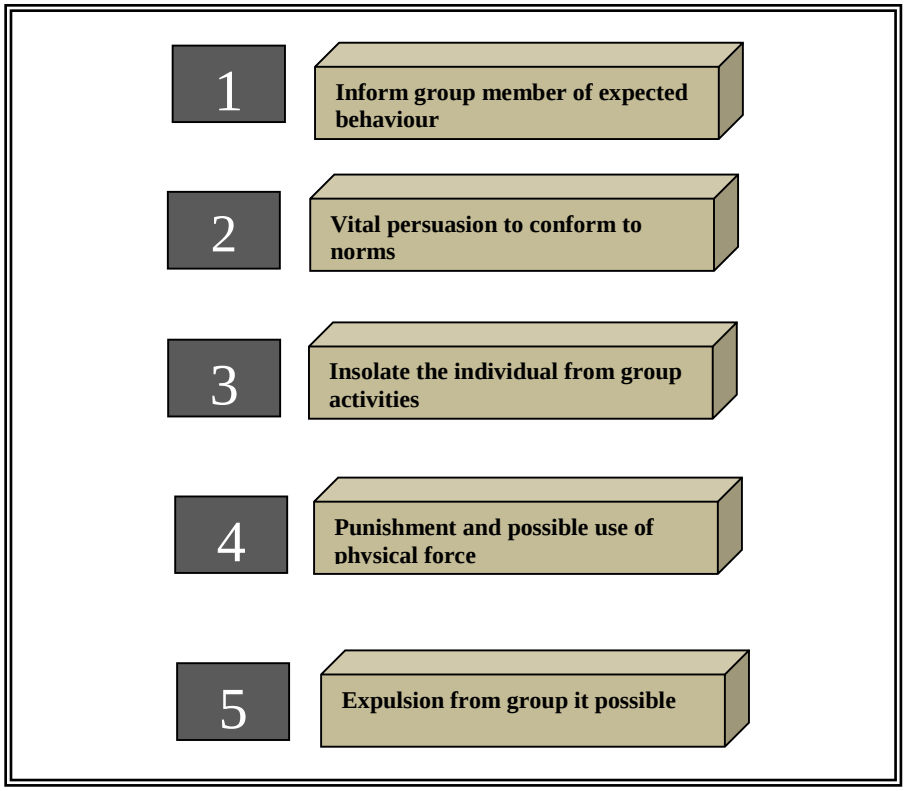


Source: Costley and Ralph (1987)

Steps in Applying Organizational Group Pressure

Serge (1985) observed that when members of a group do not conform to its norms, the first in applying group pressure is usually to describe the expected behaviour. The description is usually accompanied by the reasons the behaviour is necessary for group members. If the individual does not begin behaving within the group norms members usually try forceful persuasion, which may include threats of some form of punishment. If the individual can withstand the group persuasion long enough, the group will usually isolate the individual with verbal statements or use some form of physical violence. At this point, the individual may withdraw from the group to avoid pressure or may be forced out of the group. The individual is then no longer a part of the group, and the group members may act as if the individual did not exist. Figure 2 demonstrates the steps in applying group pressure.

Figure 3: Steps in Applying Group Pressure to Obtain Conformity with Norms:



Source: Costley and Ralph (1987)

Response to Organizational Group Pressure

Serge (1985) averred that when subjected to group pressure, some individuals resist conforming to the norms. The extent of the resistance will usually depend on the value the individual places on membership and the amount of pressure exerted by the group. An initial resistance to group pressure may take the form of attempting to get the group to change the norm or to have the group make an exception to the norm. Unless the individual has abilities or resources that are highly valuable to the group, an exception will likely be made. If a group is playing baseball and the owner of the only bat wants to get four strikes, the group might allow it in order to be able to continue using the bat. But the next time they play, more than one person will probably bring a bat. Fraternities commonly allow individuals who are star athletes or campus leaders to deviate from the group norms. If the individual is unsuccessful in obtaining an exception to the norm, he or she usually conforms. When behaviour required by the norm is objectionable, the individual may

remain in the group and continue to endure the pressure ((Costley and Ralph, 1987). When enduring the pressure is no longer "worth it", tshe individual will withdraw from the group. In a work group situation, physically leaving may not be possible without quitting. Individuals commonly try to transfer in an organization or look for another job to avoid the pressure of conforming to work group norms (Okere, 2013). Henry (1975) opined that when an individual becomes isolated from groups within the organization, the manager should be concerned about the reasons that led to the isolation by the group or if the individual withdraw from it. The manager should also be aware of the group pressures being exerted on group members. The manager may need to take action if the pressures are excessive, become detrimental to the welfare of individuals or prevent the achievement of organizational objectives (Alvin et al 2008).

Implications of Organizational Work Group Behaviour for Managers

Okere (2013), explained that effective managers must develop productive working relationships with groups. Achievement of organizational objectives requires effective coordination of group efforts. Unless group within an organization integrate group goals with organizational goals, conflict will result. Management must continually work to develop harmony among and within groups in the organization. The integration of group and organizational goals is often a difficult task. To develop effective working relations with groups, the manager must consider the motivational impact of the group on its members, the involvement of individuals in group decision-making processes, and methods of maintaining effective communication with the group. If the actions of the manager threaten satisfaction of individual needs, the result may be defensive action by the group (Costley and Ralp, 1987). If the group develops a defensive position, the manager's actions may unwittingly encourage the development of group norms and goals that conflict with organizational goals. If group norms and goals support productivity for the organization, the manager should encourage strong group loyalties. When the group is supportive of organizational objectives, the manager should help the group increase cohesiveness (Dion1973; Steve, 1986). This can be done by rewarding the group, providing status to individuals because of their group membership, providing resources for the group, or delegating responsibility to the group.

Managers and Informal Organizational Group Leaders

The manager should develop effective working relationships with the informal group leaders (Costley and Ralph, 1987). Managers often consider informal leaders as troublemakers. But because these leaders usually represent the group's norms and goals, the manager should communicate with them and respect their position. Effective managers obtain advice and assistance from informal leaders in achieving organizational

goals. Managers should use every opportunity to illustrate how group fit into the organization and how they contribute to the success of the organization. They should recognize the contributions that groups make to the organization. They should reinforce individual pride in group membership and group achievement. Managers should support group efforts to increase their effectiveness in contributing to organizational goals and member need satisfaction. Since much of the behaivour of individuals is influenced by the groups they belong to, effective management requires continuous attention to group processes.

Conclusions

Most people in organizations belong to several groups. A group can be described as two or more individuals working together to achieve a common goal. A group process necessarily involves face-to-face interaction and communication among individuals as a component. Groups develop well-defined sets of relationships as their members communicate and achieve objectives. The most important relationships center on the development of status, roles, and norms. Thus, every group develops sets of values and norms that regulate the behaviour of individual members in areas important to the group process. The cohesiveness of a group results from the attraction of the group for its members. Attraction depends on the need satisfaction that results from membership. To obtain conformity with norms, groups exert pressure on members. At the most basic level, they reward members who behave in accordance with group norms and work to achieve group objectives. When members fail to conform to norms and do not contribute to achieving objectives, the group provides some form of punishment. However, effective managers must develop working relationships with groups. Achievement of organizational objectives requires effective coordination of group efforts.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following based on the works reviewed concerning the issues bordering on organizational work group behaviour and implications for managers.

1. Effective managers should develop productive working relationships with the groups.
2. To develop effective working relations with groups, the manager should consider the motivational impact of the group on its members, the involvement of individuals in group decision-making processes, and methods of maintaining effective communication with the group
3. If group norms and goals support productivity for the organization, the manager should encourage group loyalties.

4. Manager should recognize that participation in groups should be a basic source of social need satisfaction for employees.
5. Groups should be encouraged to develop communication systems to provide information that members want, if management does not provide the information employees want.
6. Groups should be more cohesive in order to have more control over the behaviour of its member. The highly cohesive group can produce high achievement of organizational goals.
7. Both formal and informal groups within an organization should establish roles that affect the activities and responsibilities of members.
8. Managers should develop effective working relationships with the informal group leaders.
9. Managers should use every opportunity to illustrate how groups fit into the organization and how they contribute to the success of the organization.
10. Managers should recognize the contributions that groups make to the organization.
11. Managers should reinforce individual pride in group membership and group achievement.
12. Managers should support group efforts to increase their effectiveness in contributing to organizational goals and members need satisfaction.
13. Management should continuously pay attention to group processes.

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