Group Communication Roles

Working in a group sometimes poses difficulties when members don’t understand the many roles they can take. Below is a list of task roles (which add substance to discussions and structure to the group), social and maintenance roles (which keep the group working together in a positive way), and dysfunctional roles (which are detrimental to the group’s progress and should be avoided). Take a look at the typical behaviors of each and determine how you and your group members interact.

**TASK ROLES**

**Initiator/Contributor:**
- contributes ideas and suggestions
- proposes solutions and decisions
- proposes new ideas or states old ones in a novel fashion

**Information Seeker:**
- asks for clarification of comments in terms of their factual adequacy
- asks for information or facts relevant to the problem
- suggests information is needed before making decisions

**Information Giver:** offers facts or generalizations that may relate to the group’s task

**Opinion Seeker:** asks for clarification of opinions made by other members of the group and asks how people in the group feel

**Opinion Giver:**
- states beliefs or opinions having to do with suggestions made
- indicates what the group’s attitude should be

**Elaborator/Classifier:**
elaborates ideas and other contributions
offers rationales for suggestions
tries to deduce how an idea or suggestion would work if adopted by the group

Coordinator: clarifies the relationships among information, opinions, and ideas or suggestions and integration of the information, opinions, and ideas of sub-groups

Diagnostian: indicates what the problems are

Oriented/Summarizer:
- summarizes what has taken place
- points out departures from agreed on goals
- tries to bring the group back to the central issues
- raises questions about the direction in which the group is heading

Energizer: prods the group to action

Procedure Developer: handles routine tasks such as seating arrangements, obtaining equipment, and handing out pertinent papers

Secretary: keeps notes on the group’s progress

Evaluator/Critic:
- constructively analyzes group’s accomplishments according to some set of standards
- checks to see that consensus has been reached

SOCIAL/MAINTENANCE ROLES
Supporter/Encourager:
● praises, agrees with, and accepts the contributions of others
● offers warmth, solidarity, and recognition

Harmonizer:
● reconciles disagreements
● mediates differences
● reduces tensions by giving group members a chance to explore their differences

Tension Reliever:
● jokes or in some other way reduces the formality of the situation
● relaxes the group members

Conciliator:
● offers new options when his or her own ideas are involved in a conflict
● willing to admit errors so as to maintain group cohesion

Gatekeeper:
● keeps communication channels open
● encourages and facilitates interaction from those members who are usually silent

Feeling Expresser:
● makes explicit the feelings, moods, and relationships in the group
● shares own feelings with others

Follower: goes along with the movement of the group passively, accepting the ideas of others, sometimes serving as an audience

DYSFUNCTIONAL ROLES

Blocker:
• interferes with progress by rejecting ideas or taking a negative stand on any and all issues
• refuses to cooperate

**Aggressor:**
• struggles for status by deflating the status of others
• boasts, criticizes

**Deserter:**
• withdraws in some way
• remains indifferent, aloof, sometimes formal
• daydreams
• wanders from the subject, engages in irrelevant side conversations

**Dominator:**
• interrupts and embarks on long monologues
• is authoritative and tries to monopolize the group’s time.

**Recognition-Seeker:**
• attempts to gain attention in an exaggerated manner
• usually boasts about past accomplishments
• relates irrelevant personal experiences, usually in an attempt to gain sympathy

**Joker:** displays a lack of involvement in the group through inappropriate humor, horseplay, or cynicism

**Cynic:** discounts chances for group’s success