



# 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

**Diagnostician:** 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