

Balancing the task and maintenance needs in your group

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While a group is operating, the task and maintenance needs of the group need to be balanced. The group leader or the group members can attend to these needs simultaneously or separately. Each need is met through the expression of a variety of roles that support the healthy functioning of the group (see Table 1).

At the commencement and termination of a group, the group members usually exercise a smaller range of roles. It is the responsibility of the leader at these times to play the wide range of task or maintenance roles that meet the group's needs.

Task roles require responses that achieve a specific purpose (e.g. decision making and conflict resolution).

Maintenance roles require responses that attend and value the emotional needs surrounding the completion of the task (e.g. encouragement and support).

During the middle or working phase of the group it is likely that the group members will adopt a larger range of roles. During this stage the group leader observes and monitors the group performance and deals with any critical or extra-challenging situations.

Table 1

Task Roles	Description
Coordinator	Draws together the various ideas being expressed, and coordinates activities. Structures own and others' roles, sets the agenda, oversees the program development and logistics.
Starter	Initiates action by proposing ways of working, new ways of viewing problems or organising the material.
Technician	Helps the group by distributing materials, operating equipment and organising seating.
Information and opinion seeker	Asks for information, facts, clarifies ideas and feelings from other members. Facilitates information exchange among members and seeks feedback about group functioning. May need to guide the flow of a discussion (e.g. untimely, swamping, destructive and repetitive comments).

Summariser	Restates and reinforces the major ideas being expressed in the group
Energiser	Stimulates the group into action and achieves a higher quality of work
Diagnoser	Identifies difficulties and analyses barriers to progress
Reality tester	Examines the practicality of ideas, suggestions and decisions
Consensus Tester	Asks for a vote to see if a group is near consensus
Evaluator	Subjects group decisions or accomplishments to a comparison with group standards and goals.
Scribe/ recorder	Writes down and displays ideas, suggestions and decisions
Spokesperson	Speaks on behalf of the group as an announcer of decisions or outcomes from group discussions

Maintenance Roles	Description
Encourager	Is warm and understanding, gives recognition and praise
Gatekeeper	Creates openings for quieter members to have their say, redirects the discussion and avoids monopolisation by over vocal members so everyone has a chance to contribute
Communication Supporter	Makes sure people hear and understand each other; is receptive, listens and reflects back clearly
Mediator/Harmoniser	Acts as a third party to try to resolve conflicts
Trust Builder	Accepts and respects other's openness; acknowledges risk taking and values others
Process Observer	Helps examine the group's effectiveness by offering observations on group process
Faith Builder	Recognises the individual's ability to face personal challenges and find adequate solutions
Playful Joker	The ability to appreciate and discover the enjoyable side of learning

(Based on Tyson, 1989)

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