

The pattern for communication interaction

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groupwork
SOLUTIONS

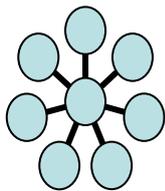
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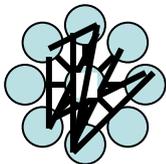
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Norma Lang, a Social Worker from the USA, created a model for understanding interaction patterns in groups. The interaction in Lang's model continually alternates between two phases with neither one phase nor the other being right or wrong. This is different to the progression idea used by most theorists who suggested groups move through specific stages of development.

The two interaction patterns are:



Allonomous - Typical of group interaction where the leader is the centre of the discussion and participants interact with the other group members by directing their discussion to the leader



Autonomous - Typical of group interaction where the discussion is between the members, with the participants talking directly to each other rather than to the leader

Allonomous interaction occurs when group members contribute to the discussion by talking to (through) the group leader. The primary focus of the group is their dependence on the group leader.

Autonomous interaction occurs where the interaction pattern is shared between most of the group members. The participants talk directly to each other with a higher level of creativity, problem solving and energy being observable.

It is important to recognise that both types of interaction are valuable. Allonomous interaction will always occur at the beginning of a group. It also can occur at times of group crisis, surprise or group termination. If a group leader expects that a group should be more autonomous too early, the group may stagnate and resist this expectation.

Autonomous interaction often occurs during the working phase of a group. The group is operating at its most efficient level during this phase. If a group remains allonomous and does not develop more autonomous interaction patterns, it could struggle, have low energy levels and ultimately collapse.

Throughout the life of a group, the group will move from allonomous to autonomous and back to the allonomous phase. It is useful for the group leader to ask:

- what phase of group development is being displayed?

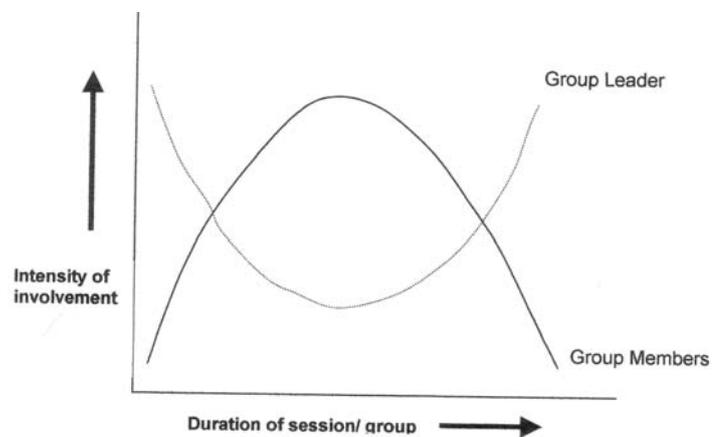
- is the current phase expected at this stage of the group or session?
- what factors are influencing the current phase of group interaction?

Figure 1 compares the intensity of involvement that will occur throughout the duration of a group session. At the beginning, the group is more allonomous with the leader having the main intensity of involvement.

In the middle stage, the group is more autonomous as the group members have the highest level of functioning and involvement with the group leader now having the opportunity to reflect on how the group is completing its task.

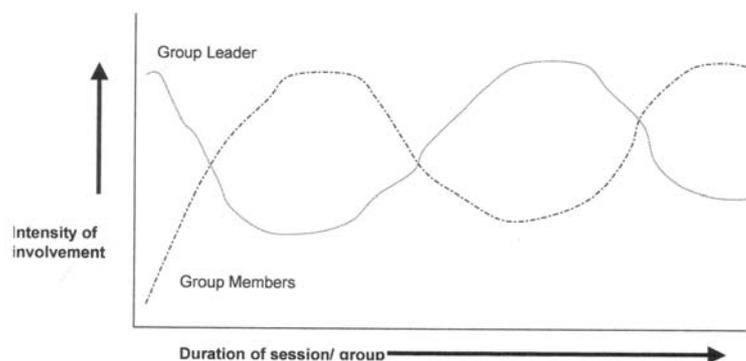
At the end of the group, the group reverts to being allonomous as the group leader provides most of the structure and has the most involvement as group members prepare themselves for closure.

Figure 1 Movement between Allonomous and Autonomous group interaction in a single session



Over the length of a group or even throughout a long session, there may be a variety of oscillations between allonomous and autonomous phases. Figure 2 highlights the oscillation that could occur.

Figure 2 Movement between Allonomous and Autonomous group interaction over a series of sessions



A group functions best when a group naturally moves between allonomous to autonomous phases. As this occurs, the group members experience periods of reflection and consolidation (when the group is more allonomous); and then times of high energy, interaction, and opportunities for new learning and creativity (when the group is more autonomous).

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