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Organisational Behaviour and Group Dynamics

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Module 3: Group Dynamics, Team Processes, and Conflict Management

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1. Foundations of Group Dynamics and Team Architecture

In contemporary enterprise operations, isolated individual effort has been largely superseded by collective team execution. A **Group** is defined as two or more interacting and interdependent individuals who have come together to achieve particular common objectives. While a traditional workgroup relies primarily on individual contributions with individual accountability and random skill sets, a **Work Team** generates positive operational synergy through coordinated effort, shared mutual accountability, complementary competencies, and collective performance deliverables.

Comparison Dimension	Traditional Workgroup	High-Performance Work Team
Core Goal	Share information and perspectives to assist individual members perform within their distinct operational areas.	Collective performance and joint value creation; output exceeds the sum of individual inputs (positive synergy).
Synergy	Neutral (or sometimes negative due to social loafing and coordination friction).	Decisively positive through complementary problem-solving and mutual cognitive reinforcement.
Accountability	Individual accountability exclusively to formal departmental supervisors.	Dual accountability: individual responsibility coupled with deep mutual accountability to team peers.
Skills Composition	Random, varied, or functionally identical skill sets.	Carefully selected complementary competencies (technical, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills).
Leadership Style	Strong, clearly focused, single formal authoritarian leader.	Shared or rotating leadership roles depending on project phases and task demands.

Typology of Contemporary Organizational Teams

- **Problem-Solving Teams:** Comprise 5 to 12 employees from the same operational department who meet for a few hours each week to investigate quality defects, workflow bottlenecks, and safety hazards, recommending solutions to management (e.g., Japanese Quality Circles).
- **Self-Managed Work Teams (SMWTs):** Autonomous groups of 10 to 15 employees who take on full operational responsibility for producing an entire product or delivering a complete service.

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Members plan schedules, allocate tasks, order raw supplies, resolve internal conflicts, and conduct peer performance appraisals with minimal direct supervision.

- **Cross-Functional Teams:** Groups assembled from employees of approximately the same hierarchical level but from diverse functional disciplines (marketing, engineering, finance, operations, human resources) to coordinate complex strategic projects, new product introductions, or ERP implementations.
- **Virtual Teams:** Geographically distributed collaborators who leverage enterprise digital collaboration software, cloud workspaces, and videoconferencing platforms to achieve shared goals without physical co-location. Success requires high technological infrastructure, explicit communication protocols, and deliberate trust-building rituals.

2. Bruce Tuckman's Five-Stage Model of Group Development

Bruce Tuckman (1965, amended with Mary Ann Jensen in 1977) formulated the seminal sequential framework explaining how teams mature over time:

1. **Stage 1: Forming (Orientation):** Characterized by high uncertainty regarding the team's purpose, structure, and leadership. Members test boundaries, explore acceptable behaviors, and establish initial interpersonal impressions. The leader must provide clear direction, articulate team objectives, and define member roles.
2. **Stage 2: Storming (Intragroup Conflict):** As work commences, members confront interpersonal friction and resist organizational constraints. Intragroup competition emerges over task direction, leadership influence, and role allocation. If managed constructively, storming clarifies differences; if mismanaged, teams stall in permanent hostility. Leaders must mediate disputes and establish ground rules.
3. **Stage 3: Norming (Cohesion and Standard Setting):** Close relationships develop, interpersonal conflicts subside, and strong group cohesiveness solidifies. The group establishes shared expectations, operating norms, and behavioral standards. Members experience mutual camaraderie and a collective identity ("we" replaces "I").
4. **Stage 4: Performing (Task Execution):** The team's structural energy shifts from getting to know and understand each other to executing the task at hand. Roles become fluid, communication is open and efficient, and the group operates as a high-performing autonomous unit capable of complex problem-solving.
5. **Stage 5: Adjourning (Termination and Dissolution):** For temporary project teams, task forces, and committees, the final stage focuses on wrapping up deliverables, documenting post-project learnings, and transitioning members to new corporate assignments. Members may experience emotional closure and reflection.

3. Group Properties: Roles, Norms, Status, and Cohesiveness

Group dynamics are governed by fundamental structural properties that shape member behavior:

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- **Group Roles and Role Conflict:** A role is a set of expected behavior patterns attributed to someone occupying a given position in a social unit. Individuals manage *Role Identity* (attitudes consistent with a role), *Role Perception* (our view of how we should act), and *Role Expectation* (how others believe we should act). **Role Conflict** arises when an individual is confronted with divergent, mutually contradictory role expectations (e.g., a newly promoted supervisor balancing managerial cost-cutting orders with loyalty to former shop-floor peers).
- **Group Norms and the Hawthorne Lesson:** Norms are acceptable standards of behavior shared by group members. Norms dictate dress codes, performance effort, resource allocation, and interpersonal conduct. Members conform to norms to gain social acceptance and avoid peer ostracism.
- **Social Loafing and the Ringelmann Effect:** The subconscious tendency for individuals to expend less physical or cognitive effort when working collectively in a group than when working individually. German engineer Max Ringelmann discovered that in rope-pulling contests, individual force declined progressively as group size increased. Managers mitigate social loafing by: keeping team sizes lean (5 to 9 members), establishing individual accountability, and using transparent peer evaluation metrics.
- **Group Cohesiveness:** The degree to which members are attracted to each other and motivated to stay in the group. High cohesiveness leads to high productivity *only when group performance norms align with corporate goals*. If high-cohesive teams harbor negative corporate norms, they systematically restrict production.

4. Group Decision-Making: Pitfalls and Structured Remediation Techniques

While group decisions leverage diverse knowledge and foster stakeholder buy-in, they are susceptible to severe psychological dysfunctions:

A. Groupthink (Irving Janis)

Groupthink refers to a mode of collective thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, where members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. Symptoms of groupthink include: (1) **Illusion of Invulnerability** creating unwarranted optimism; (2) **Collective Rationalization** dismissing warning signals; (3) **Unquestioned Belief in Inherent Group Morality**; (4) **Stereotyped Views of Out-Groups**; (5) **Direct Pressure on Dissenters**; (6) **Self-Censorship** of personal doubts; and (7) **Appointed Self-Censoring "Mindguards"** shielding executives from adverse feedback. Historic examples include the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Challenger space shuttle launch disaster.

B. Groupshift (Group Polarization)

The tendency for group discussion to exaggerate the initial positions of members, causing the collective decision to shift toward a more extreme position than any individual member originally held. In corporate boardrooms, this frequently produces **Risky Shift**, where groups commit to reckless speculative ventures because individual accountability is diluted across the collective body.

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Structured Techniques for Optimizing Group Decisions

Decision Technique	Operational Mechanics	Primary Behavioral Advantages	Practical Managerial Limitations
Brainstorming (Alex Osborn)	Group members propose creative ideas rapidly under strict ground rules: zero criticism permitted, wild ideas encouraged, building on others' ideas.	Overcomes cognitive inhibitions; generates high volume of diverse creative concepts.	Can suffer from production blocking (waiting for turns to speak) and evaluation apprehension.
Nominal Group Technique (NGT)	Structured 4-step process: (1) Silent independent generation of ideas; (2) Round-robin public recording; (3) Group discussion for clarification; (4) Silent, independent mathematical voting and ranking.	Restricts verbal dominance by vocal executives; ensures equal participation by introverted members; eliminates social loafing.	Requires disciplined meeting facilitators and time-consuming administrative coordination.
Delphi Technique	Iterative, completely anonymous survey process administered to geographically dispersed expert panels across multiple rounds with summarized feedback until consensus emerges.	Eliminates status bias, interpersonal intimidation, and geographic travel costs; ideal for long-range technology forecasting.	Slow turnaround times; high dependence on participant literacy and continuous motivation.

5. Power, Politics, and Influence Tactics in Organizations

Power is the capacity that person A has to influence the behavior of person B so that person B acts in accordance with A's wishes. The core foundation of power is **Dependency**: the greater B's dependency on A (for information, resources, or career promotions), the greater power A possesses.

French and Raven's Five Bases of Power

1. **Coercive Power:** Dependent on fear and the ability to administer physical or psychological punishments (dismissal, suspension, undesirable shift assignments). Triggers compliance or toxic resistance.
2. **Reward Power:** Dependent on the ability to distribute valued positive economic rewards (pay raises, bonuses, plum project assignments). Fosters contractual compliance.
3. **Legitimate Power:** Derived from formal structural position in the organizational hierarchy (the authority of an executive managing director or army captain).
4. **Expert Power:** Derived from specialized technical expertise, unique knowledge, or critical analytical skills (e.g., senior cloud cybersecurity architects). Fosters genuine personal commitment.
5. **Referent Power:** Derived from charisma, personal admiration, and emotional identification. Others comply because they respect and wish to emulate the leader.

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Behavioral Insight: Formal powers (Coercive, Reward, Legitimate) produce outward behavioral compliance; Personal powers (Expert, Referent) cultivate deep intrinsic commitment and superior organizational citizenship.

Political Tactics and Impression Management

Organizational politics refers to activities that are not required as part of an individual's formal role, but that influence the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the enterprise. Common tactics include: forming strategic coalitions, controlling the flow of information, establishing alliances with powerful mentors, and engaging in **Impression Management (IM)**—the process by which individuals attempt to control the impressions others form of them through self-promotion, flattery (ingratiation), conformity, and exemplary role modeling.

6. Conflict Management: Models, Processes, and Strategic Resolution

Conflict is a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about. Modern OB differentiates between **Functional Conflict** (constructive cognitive debate over ideas and tasks that prevents stagnation and stimulates innovation) and **Dysfunctional Conflict** (destructive emotional clashes and interpersonal attacks that derail operational productivity).

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Handling Grid

Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann mapped conflict resolution styles along two behavioral axes: **Assertiveness** (the degree to which the party attempts to satisfy their own concerns) and **Cooperativeness** (the degree to which the party attempts to satisfy the other party's concerns):

Conflict Style	Behavioral Orientation	Appropriate Situational Application
Competing (Forcing)	High Assertiveness, Low Cooperativeness: Win-Lose orientation; pursuing one's own goal at the other's expense.	Vital emergencies requiring decisive action (cost-cutting crisis, safety violations, enforcing unpopular regulatory rules).
Collaborating (Integrating)	High Assertiveness, High Cooperativeness: Win-Win orientation; exploring joint solutions that satisfy all parties fully.	Complex strategic challenges where both sets of concerns are too important to compromise; integrating diverse perspectives.
Compromising (Sharing)	Moderate Assertiveness, Moderate Cooperativeness: Splitting the difference; both parties give up something to reach agreement.	Temporary settlements to complex issues under tight deadlines; when equal-power opponents hold mutually exclusive goals.
Avoiding (Withdrawing)	Low Assertiveness, Low Cooperativeness: Sidestepping or postponing the conflict; pretending the issue does not exist.	Trivial issues; when potential disruption outweighs resolution benefits; to let emotions cool down during heated disputes.

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Conflict Style	Behavioral Orientation	Appropriate Situational Application
Accommodating (Smoothing)	Low Assertiveness, High Cooperativeness: Self-sacrificing; placing the other party's interests above one's own.	When the issue is far more important to the other party; to build social capital and preserve harmonious relationships for future cooperation.

7. Occupational Stress Management and Workplace Well-Being

Stress is a dynamic physiological and psychological condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint, or demand related to what they desire, and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. Stress manifests as **Eustress** (constructive positive challenge that sharpens focus) or **Distress** (excessive chronic strain triggering physical and mental exhaustion).

A. Structural Drivers of Workplace Stress

- **Task and Environmental Demands:** Excessive workload quotas, extreme project deadlines, physical ergonomic hazards, and macro-economic job insecurity.
- **Role Demands:** *Role Ambiguity* (unclear expectations regarding responsibilities and performance criteria); *Role Conflict* (facing contradictory demands from multiple superiors); and *Role Overload* (possessing more tasks than can be feasibly accomplished within working hours).
- **Interpersonal Friction:** Hostile work relationships, lack of social support from peers, supervisory micromanagement, and workplace bullying.

B. Stress Inoculation and Coping Strategies

1. **Individual Coping Mechanisms:** Practicing structured time management (Eisenhower matrix prioritization), cognitive reframing, mindfulness meditation, physical cardiovascular exercise, and cultivating personal social support networks.
2. **Organizational Stress Interventions:** Improving job design (Hackman & Oldham enrichment), establishing transparent role expectations, implementing Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) providing confidential psychological counseling, enforcing equitable workload distributions, and instituting institutional corporate policies supporting work-life harmony and digital disconnection boundaries.

8. Deviant Workplace Behaviours (Counterproductive Work Behaviours)

Deviant Workplace Behaviour (DWB)—also termed Counterproductive Work Behaviour (CWB)—is voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and, in so doing, threatens the well-being of the organization, its members, or both. Behavioral researchers classify workplace deviance into four distinct quadrants based on the organizational vs interpersonal target and severity of action:

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Deviance Quadrant	Target of Harm	Severity	Specific Workplace Manifestations
Production Deviance	Organizational Infrastructure	Minor to Moderate	Leaving work early, taking intentional excessive breaks, intentionally working slowly (cyberloafing), wasting corporate resources.
Property Deviance	Organizational Physical Assets	Serious to Severe	Stealing corporate property, industrial sabotage, misusing corporate expense accounts, physical equipment damage.
Political Deviance	Interpersonal Colleagues	Minor to Moderate	Showing favoritism, spreading malicious rumors, gossiping about colleagues, blaming peers for personal errors.
Personal Aggression	Interpersonal Colleagues	Serious to Severe	Workplace bullying, verbal harassment, physical threats, psychological intimidation, sexual harassment in the workplace.

Preventing workplace deviance requires comprehensive organizational governance: establishing transparent codes of conduct, fair compensation parity (perceived distributive and procedural justice), anonymous grievance redressal committees under the POSH Act 2013, and zero-tolerance supervisory policies against bullying.

9. Interpersonal Communication and Strategic Negotiation Dynamics

Effective communication is the nervous system of an organization. The classical **Shannon-Weaver Communication Model** demonstrates that communication is a multi-stage transactional loop: Sender encodes a message, transmits through a physical or digital channel, Receiver decodes the message, and provides Feedback, all surrounded by environmental and psychological **Noise** (perceptual filtering, semantic ambiguity, information overload).

Negotiation Architecture: Distributive Versus Integrative Bargaining

Negotiation is an interpersonal process in which two or more parties exchange goods or services and attempt to agree on the exchange rate for them. Two primary approaches exist:

- **Distributive Bargaining (Zero-Sum, Fixed-Pie):** Competitive bargaining where any gain by one party represents an exact mathematical loss for the other (e.g., buying a used corporate van). Focuses on driving a hard bargain between resistance points.
- **Integrative Bargaining (Variable-Sum, Win-Win):** Collaborative problem-solving where parties cooperate to "expand the pie," discovering creative solutions that satisfy the core interests of both sides. Fosters long-term collaborative partnerships.

Key negotiation parameters include: **BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement)**, which defines the walk-away threshold below which no agreement should be accepted; and **ZOPA**

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(Zone of Possible Agreement), the overlapping bargaining range between the buyer's maximum reservation price and the seller's minimum acceptable price.

10. Louis Pondy's Five-Stage Process Model of Organizational Conflict

Organizational conflict is rarely a static, isolated incident; it is a dynamic, evolving interactive episode. Louis Pondy (1967) established that conflict progresses through five distinct sequential stages:

1. **Stage 1: Latent Conflict:** Underlying operational conditions exist that carry the potential to trigger disputes, including competition for scarce budgetary resources, divergent departmental goals, operational task interdependence, and jurisdictional ambiguities. Latent conflict is dormant, waiting for a catalyst.
2. **Stage 2: Perceived Conflict:** One or both parties become cognitively aware that an operational goal is being obstructed or that another department is encroaching on their territory. Notice that conflict can be perceived without emotional animosity (e.g., recognizing a scheduling conflict).
3. **Stage 3: Felt Conflict:** The cognitive perception escalates into subjective emotional distress. Parties experience personalized anxiety, anger, hostility, and resentment. Interpersonal trust evaporates, and defensive routines harden.
4. **Stage 4: Manifest Conflict:** The emotional tension erupts into overt behavioral confrontation. Manifest conflict includes aggressive verbal arguments, obstructionist behavior, intentional delay in sharing vital project data, non-cooperation in interdepartmental meetings, and political lobbying.
5. **Stage 5: Conflict Aftermath:** The legacy and emotional fallout resulting from how the conflict was resolved. If resolved collaboratively through integrative win-win problem solving, the aftermath fosters mutual respect and enhanced teamwork. If resolved forcefully through coercive power or avoidance, the lingering resentment creates toxic latent conflict that detonates during the next project cycle.

11. Robert Karasek's Job Demands-Control Model of Occupational Strain

In occupational health psychology, Robert Karasek established the landmark **Job Demands-Control (JDC) Model**, demonstrating that workplace psychological strain does not result simply from heavy workloads, but from the interaction between **Job Demands** (workload quotas, cognitive complexity, time pressures) and **Job Control / Decision Latitude** (employee autonomy in choosing when, how, and with what methods to execute work):

Demands vs. Control Quadrant	Job Control / Autonomy Level	Job Demands Level	Psychological & Behavioral Outcomes
High-Strain Jobs	Low Job Autonomy	High Job Demands	Maximum psychological strain, chronic anxiety, exhaustion, and physical illness (e.g., assembly line workers, call center telemarketers).

Demands vs. Control Quadrant	Job Control / Autonomy Level	Job Demands Level	Psychological & Behavioral Outcomes
Active Jobs	High Job Autonomy	High Job Demands	Optimal learning, high motivation, personal growth, professional mastery, and resilient performance (e.g., corporate executives, surgeons, software architects).
Passive Jobs	Low Job Autonomy	Low Job Demands	Gradual decline in overall activity, learned helplessness, boredom, skill atrophy, and disengagement (e.g., repetitive filing clerks).
Low-Strain Jobs	High Job Autonomy	Low Job Demands	Low psychological strain, calm environment, but may lack creative challenge (e.g., tenured archival custodians).

Managerial Prescription: Rather than merely reducing workload demands, corporate managers should expand employee decision-making autonomy and provide robust peer social support (the Demand-Control-Support model) to transform high-strain jobs into invigorating, active learning roles.

12. Organizational Politics: Political Games and Defensive Behaviors

Henry Mintzberg identified several classic "Political Games" played within corporate hierarchies when formal authority is contested:

- **Insurgency Games:** Frontline workers or lower managers actively resist authority through subtle non-compliance or "work-to-rule" slowdowns.
- **Counter-Insurgency Games:** Senior management deploys disciplinary sanctions, surveillance, and selective promotions to suppress rebellion.
- **Sponsorship Games:** Junior managers attach their career fortunes to powerful, rising senior executives to gain rapid advancement.
- **Alliance-Building Games:** Peer managers form informal mutual-defense coalitions to protect departmental budgets and influence board decisions.
- **Empire-Building Games:** Ambitious executives aggressively hoard headcount, physical facilities, and budget lines to justify greater status and compensation.

Organizational Defensive Behaviors

When employees perceive organizational politics as threatening or unfair, they engage in defensive behaviors to protect themselves:

1. **Avoiding Action:** *Overconforming* (rigidly adhering to rules to evade responsibility); *Passing the Buck* (diverting decisions to colleagues); *Playing Dumb* (pleading ignorance to avoid difficult assignments); *Stretching and Stalling* (prolonging tasks to appear busy).
2. **Avoiding Blame:** *Buffing* (rigorously documenting every routine email to prove complete innocence); *Playing Safe* (taking only risk-free projects); *Justifying* (developing elaborate

rationalizations for performance shortfalls); *Scapegoating* (shifting blame onto external factors or junior peers).

3. **Avoiding Change:** *Prevention* (covertly undermining a change initiative before it launches); *Protecting Turf* (vigorously guarding departmental secrets and resources against cross-functional sharing).

13. Meredith Belbin's Nine Team Roles Architecture

Dr. Meredith Belbin (1981) conducted extensive nine-year experimental research at Henley Management College, discovering that the success or failure of a team does not depend on intellect, but on the balance of behavioral **Team Roles**. A team role is a tendency to behave, contribute, and interrelate with others in a particular way. Belbin identified nine essential roles grouped across three action orientations:

Role Category	Belbin Team Role	Core Behavioral Contribution	Allowable Weakness
Action-Oriented	**Shaper**	Challenging, dynamic, thrives under pressure; drives team to overcome obstacles.	Prone to provocation; may offend people's feelings in pursuit of results.
Action-Oriented	**Implementer**	Practical, reliable, disciplined; turns abstract concepts and plans into practical workable actions.	Somewhat inflexible; slow to respond to unexpected new opportunities.
Action-Oriented	**Completer Finisher**	Painstaking, conscientious, anxious; searches out errors and omissions; delivers strictly on time.	Inclined to worry excessively; reluctant to delegate small tasks.
People-Oriented	**Coordinator**	Mature, confident, a natural chairperson; clarifies goals, promotes decision-making, delegates well.	Can be seen as manipulative; may offload personal work onto others.
People-Oriented	**Teamworker**	Cooperative, perceptive, mild, diplomatic; listens, builds bridges, averts interpersonal friction.	Indecisive in crunch situations; avoids personal confrontation.
People-Oriented	**Resource Investigator**	Extroverted, enthusiastic, communicative; explores external opportunities, develops contacts.	Over-optimistic; loses initial enthusiasm once novelty wears off.
Thought-Oriented	**Plant**	Creative, imaginative, unorthodox; generates brilliant radical ideas and solves difficult problems.	Ignores practical details; too preoccupied with abstract ideas to communicate efficiently.

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Role Category	Belbin Team Role	Core Behavioral Contribution	Allowable Weakness
Thought-Oriented	**Monitor Evaluator**	Sober, strategic, discerning; sees all options, judges accurately and dispassionately.	Lacks drive and ability to inspire others; overly critical of creative proposals.
Thought-Oriented	**Specialist**	Single-minded, self-starting, dedicated; provides rare specialized knowledge and technical skills.	Contributes on a narrow front; dwells on technical minutiae.

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