

COHESIVENESS MAKES A GROUP DYNAMIC : AN OVERVIEW

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"The case of Srijana Forest Users Group (FUG) provides a unique experience of managing forest resource in Nepal. It is unique in the sense that the squatters have been recognized as partners able to make an important contribution to forest management."
Pokhare, (2000)

Groups are vital for any developmental activity. After the era of mass communication, develop workers/planners feel that the development can come in realities only through group media and group methods. Internationally, there are several development programs/development activities implemented through participatory methods. Today, the participatory methods are being looked as basic tool for development activities. Experiences reveal that several successes and failure from different countries development programs/project, it is true the participation of people in development activities still awaited. In every sphere of life, people prefer to live in-group. Many groups may be functional and non-functional. Every group has its objective since its birth, but very few are able to achieve it.

Many researches have been conducted on the basis of group methods for developmental activities, in developed and developing countries. It is reported that group dynamism is a major criterion for achieving the target through group methods. This groups dynamism is dependent on various factors viz. availability of resources, common need, external and interest, communication, trust and gullibility etc. But all group processes and task, which are responsible for group dynamics, mostly dependent on the group cohesiveness.

What is group dynamics ?

In order to understand group behavior and group dynamics, one has to take into account the various aspects of the groups. The concept of group is as old as civilization itself. As sociologists put it, "Man is a social animal" who prefer to live in a group rather than in isolation. Consequently, each individual is a member of one or other group in the sense that he lives and performs most of his meaningful activities in or through groups. The most common groups with which a person interacts are his family followed by the group of his friends, work group etc. His behavior is largely regulated by the norms, plans, values and even taboos of a group/groups to which she/he belongs.

Group dynamics is concerned with the interactions and forces between group members in social situation. There are different connotations which have been attached to this term. One normative view is that group dynamics describes how a group should be organized and conducted. Another view is that, it consists of a set of techniques like role playing, brain storming, buzz groups, group therapy, sensitivity training etc. A third view is one, in which dynamic group is viewed from the perspective of internal nature of groups like how they are formed? What are their structures and processes and how they affects individual members and other groups?

The group as a unit of analysis is important for understanding the group. In simple

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terms, a group refers to two or more persons who interact for a common explicit purpose. When a group is formed, it is basically characterized by the following.

- i. The individual accepted as their own common group goal of the group and the action of the group fulfill the need of each individual.
- ii. The accomplishment of the group task involves interaction of the members.

Group dynamics has gained popular familiarity since World War II but unfortunately, with its increasing circulation, its meaning has become imprecise. Cartwright *et al.*, (1968) reported that, according to different uses, group dynamics refers to a sort of political ideology concerning the ways in which groups should be organized and managed. This ideology emphasizes the importance of the democratic leadership, the participation of members in decisions and gain both to society and to each individual to be obtained through cooperative activities in groups. Second popular use of the term, group dynamics refers to a set of techniques, such as role-playing, buzz sessions, observation and feedback of group processes and group decisions. These techniques have been identified most closely with the training laboratories and employed widely in training program designed to improve skill in human relation and in management of conferences and committees. Third use of the term is, it refers to a field of inquiry dedicated to achieving knowledge about nature of groups and larger institutions. It is defined as group property that can be "perceived by individual members regarding the degree, extent or strength of mutual attention given by the membership to processes of cooperation, control and task communication." (Johnson, 1976).

Everyone has an ideology concerning the ways in which group life should be organized. According to Cartwright *et al.* (1968), Group dynamics refers to the field of inquiry dedicated to advancing knowledge about the nature of groups, the law of their development and their inter-relations with individuals, other groups and larger institutions.

Group cohesiveness

The principle concerning one or the other aspects of the group are not only tentative but also full of notable exceptions, if not seeming contradictions. It is also true that two groups are not completely identical in all the aspects like size, composition, goal, program activities and cohesion. A functional group is dynamic and shall always have some progress through its activities and encounter problems of varying intensity and nature from within or out side.

The term group cohesiveness has come to have a central place in theories of group dynamics. It is one of the important characteristics of any group. It is to provide an environment that is facilitative to positive growth and/or change for its members. Cohesiveness is essential to a group ability to carryout the functions. Group cohesiveness has been investigated from two points of view :

- i. To ascertain the conditions that bring about various levels of cohesiveness.
- ii. To know the effect of different levels of cohesiveness on the group and its members.

Although, several definitions have been given to the term "group cohesiveness" on the basis of different conceptual properties. We employ the definition advanced by Festinger *et al.* (1951), stated that "Group cohesiveness is the resultant of all the forces acting on members to remain in the group". Similarly, many investigators have equated the term cohesiveness with "attraction to group" focusing mainly upon the forces acting on members

to remain in the group. Irving *et al.* (1972) defined the group cohesiveness as "A high degree of amiability and esprit de corps among the members of an in group." Bhatt *et al.* (1998) defined the term cohesiveness in a trainer's manual that "Cohesiveness is the degree to which the members of a group like and support each other." Cohesiveness exists as a dynamics, when the following conditions are present :

- * The members exhibit a high degree of solidarity.
- * The members defend the group from internal and external threats.
- * Volunteer attendance, participation and mutual help are high.
- * The defense of group norms is strong.

These conditions help the members feel sufficient trust in the group. It provides ability to share personal concerns comfortably. It motivates the members to work towards group's objectives for achieving group goals. It has positive effect on group think. It facilitates in organizing the group.

Group cohesiveness, in this sense, refers to the degree to which the member of a group desires to remain in a group. Thus, the member of a high cohesive group, in contrast to groups having low level of cohesiveness, are more concerned with their members and are, therefore, more strongly motivated to contribute to the group's welfare, to advance its objectives and to participate in its activities. Cohesiveness contributes to a group's potency and vitality, it increases the significance of membership for those who belong to the group.

How cohesiveness affects group dynamics?

From the definition of Festinger *et al.* (1951) cohesiveness is the "resultant of all forces acting on members in the group." These forces are determined jointly by certain properties of the group and by certain characteristics of the members which, in conjunction, can be conceived as the immediate determinants of cohesiveness. These forces, in turn, have various effects that constitute the consequences of group cohesiveness. Muniratnam (1997) reported that, in the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and in sustaining them, there are several problems like.

- Heterogeneity arising out of varied socio-economic and cultural background of members led to several problems in the formation of a group.
- The group must be formed strictly along non-political lines.
- At least 10 per cent of groups formed become non-viable due to lack of committed leadership, non-adherence to norms, migration of certain members etc.

It shows that there may be various problems if cohesiveness is not there in the group.

Incentive properties of groups

This concerns the properties of groups that influence its cohesiveness and result in the dynamics of group effect. Festinger and Kelley (1951) reported that, if group membership puts a person in close association and frequent interaction with other members, his evaluation of these members will influence his attraction to membership in the group. Homans (1950) puts another view. if the frequency of interaction between two or more persons, increases the degree of their liking for one another will increase and vice-versa. Researchers have made it clear that, Values, interests, attitudes and beliefs are important to the members of a group usually heightens attraction (Heider, 1958; Festinger, 1954 and Seashore, 1958). Lott and Lott (1965) reported that, attraction among individuals will be

found to increase when their common threat stems from an extreme source. When there exist the possibility that cooperative behaviours may reduce or eliminate the threat and when single individual can't escape from either the group or the threat. This shows that membership of a group, frequency of interaction, threat, attitude and interest affect the cohesiveness of a group.

Researches conducted on job satisfaction revealed a general tendency for satisfaction with ones' job to negatively correlated with frequency of absence from work. Coach and French (1948) found that, workers whose rate of production fell just below the group standard, so that feeling of failure were most intense, had extremely high rate of leaving the company. A study comparing two styles of leadership reported by Preston and Heintz (1949) showed that members of groups having participatory leader as compared with those having supervisory leader, expressed more satisfaction with the group's product, felt the group's task to be more interesting, believed the group to be more efficient and gave more weight to the attitudes of other members. The effect of the size of group on its cohesiveness create interest of a number of investigators. Porter and Lowler (1965) remarkably pointed out that, as the size of the unit increases there is decrease in job satisfaction and a concomitant increase in absence rates, turn over rates and the incidence of labor disputes.

It appears, then, that the membership, similarity among members of the group, interdependency among members, group activities, leadership and decision making, group atmosphere and group size etc. have an effect on group cohesiveness or vice-versa.

Consequences of group of cohesiveness

As discussed earlier, there is considerable evidence in support of incentive properties of a group, various indicators of group cohesiveness and correlate with turnover of membership. There are four principal consequences of cohesiveness on the group i.e. ability of the group to retain its members, power of the group to influence its members, degree of participation and loyalty of members and feeling of security amongst its members. Few reports have also been associated with the effect of cohesiveness on group think.

In the treatment of the factors affecting the maintenance of group membership, Thibaut and Kelley (1959) employed different concepts but arrive at conclusion that, a person's attraction to a group depends upon how the level of expected outcomes for member relates to his comparison level. According to this formulation then, given a particular level of outcomes, a person's attraction to a group depends upon his comparison level for alternatives.

The consequence of cohesiveness most thoroughly investigated is the power that cohesiveness gives a group to influence its members. Festinger (1950) postulated a relationship between cohesiveness and power. He asserts that, the magnitude of force that a group can setup on a member, counter to his own forces can not exceed the resultant forces.

acting on him to remain in the group. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) reported that, a person's dependance on a group is greater than his level of expected outcomes from membership and exceed his comparison level for alternatives and that the power of group over a member is directly related to his dependency upon the group. Group cohesiveness leads to greater participation and freedom in communication, greater acceptance of the group goals and less hostility and tension (Raven and Ruvin, 1976).

Since, cohesiveness contributes to a group's capacity to retain members and to exert influence over them, resulting in heightening of participation in group activities. Hill and Trist (1955) noted that, temporary withdrawal from participation, perhaps through absence from work, is not same as withdrawal from group membership. Cartwright *et al.* (1968) summarized that, as cohesiveness increases there is more frequent communication among members, a greater degree of participation in group activities and a lower rate of absence. Thus, we may expect a correlation between cohesiveness and rate of participation.

There are some evidences concerning with the effects of group cohesiveness on the personal adjustment of its members. Seashore (1954) obtained a negative correlation between the cohesiveness of industrial work groups and the tendency of members to report that they often felt 'jumpy' or nervous on the job. Myers (1962) and Julian *et al.* (1966) reported that, inter group competition produces an increase in group cohesiveness that in turn, leads to a heightening of self esteem and lowering of anxiety among the members of the group. The proposition that group cohesiveness leads to a sense of security among members was also supported by the results of an experiment conducted by Pepitone and Reichling (1955).

Recent studies suggested that conformity tendencies may be strongest in a person who is most fearful of disapproval and rejection. People with strong and filiative needs prefer their work colleagues to be good friend, Irving *et al.*, (1972). They further reported that, the prime condition repeated encountered in the case studies of fiascoes is group cohesiveness. The more amiability and a esprit de corps among the members i.e. group cohesiveness does not invariably lead to symptom of groupthink. Though high degree of group cohesiveness is conducive to a high frequency of symptoms of groupthink which in turn, are conducive to high frequency of defect in decision making. Nixon II (1979) found that, the likelihood of conformity increases when there is more group consensus, task interdependency, homogeneity of group members and cohesiveness. The informal group norms are more effective and agreeable to all. Hass and Drabek (1973) suggested that a discrepancy between official rules and informal group norms can lead to serious disruptions in organization. Hossain, (1982) reported that, consequences of organization now lays greater emphasis on organization building, group solidarity, cohesiveness and organizational achievement.

The informal group norms are those which are traditionally followed in the group or it could be said that the characteristics of traditional groups are useful for the group dynamics.

Characteristics of traditional groups

Bhatt *et al.* (1998) reported that, there are several organizations and groups that traditionally exist in the rural societies of developing and underdeveloped countries. These groups play an important role in the community life, important among them are group of religious persons, group of spinners, farmers group, group of youth, ladies groups etc. Traditional groups have following characteristics :

- * All informally formed group among like-minded villagers by themselves
- * They pursue specific and well-defined objectives
- * They are often established their unwritten rules which are simple and strictly enforced
- * The organization are on a voluntary basis
- * All members take an active part in all works

- * The members provides not only labor but also cash and material contribution in case of emergency
- * Social cohesiveness is greatly enforced by the traditional groups
- * The self-help spirit is passed from one generation to another
- * The elder people usually hand over the valuable experience and knowledge to younger generation via the traditional organization

Advantages and strength of traditional groups

- * The spirit of self reliance
- * Groupings of like-minded and like-fated people
- * Common interest in community development
- * Voluntary participation in social and community activities
- * More concerned efforts for common interest
- * Fair and equal rights and shares

CONCLUSION

We have found evidences in incentive properties and consequences of group cohesiveness, which affect the group processes and tasks. As cohesiveness increases there is an increase in a group capacity to retain its members and in degree of participation by members in group activities. The greater the group's cohesiveness, the more power it has to bring about conformity to its norms and to gain acceptance of its goal. Finally high cohesive group provides a source of security for members, which serves to reduce anxiety and to heighten self-esteem. The duality of cohesiveness may explain some of consistencies in reasserts of group effectiveness. Marvin Shaw in a book "Group Dynamics" presents as a plausible hypothesis that the high cohesive groups are more effective than low cohesive groups in achieving their respective goals. It further becomes clear that cohesiveness affects a group's capacity to retain members positively as well as the active participation of members in beneficial activities. Cohesiveness provides a group to adhere to the norms. It sets for it-self, and fulfill its goals. This character in a group, diminishes the filling of anxiety among its members, whereby installing a sense of security in them as well as raising their self-esteem. All in all, cohesiveness helps in making a group consistent as well as increase its effectiveness.

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