

▶ Section 1

Group Process

Introduction to Group Process

Group process refers to the flow of behaviors in a group where the emphasis is on how things happen rather than on what is happening. The Group Process category encompasses the majority of the activities presented in this collection. There are a wide variety of activities that meet a number of purposes: icebreakers, getting acquainted, group norms, member roles, leadership, dimensions of group effectiveness, diversity, change management, organizational culture, and closure.

The use of these activities is dependent on the facilitator's assessment of the group's stage of development, its current structure, and the environment in which it functions. Wise choices of group process activities can help to facilitate group growth, to ease a group through a difficult period or process, and to lead to development of the individuals within the group. In addition, by participating in these kinds of activities, participants can learn what to expect in the ongoing development of their own groups and how to handle various situations that arise within those groups.

Icebreakers and *getting acquainted* activities help to "break the ice" at the beginning of a session or early in the stages of a newly formed group. Session beginnings are important because they set the stage and lay the groundwork for active participation in the experience that will follow. These activities also can be utilized to get participants to mix together and/or to form subgroups. *Closing* activities provide techniques to debrief a session or group experience through a structured exercise.

Activities addressing *group norms*, *member roles*, and *leadership* examine a group's fundamental structure, which is the underlying pattern of stable relationships among the group members. Group norms are social standards or guidelines that describe what behaviors should and should not be performed. If written down, they can become the formal rules of the group. Member roles are sets of behaviors that are characteristic of persons within a particular group context; that is, group members tend to perform certain actions and interact with other group members in a particular way concerning both task and relationship dimensions. Group structure is influenced by *organizational culture*—the expectations and practices of the organization, including shared philosophy, attitudes, rituals and ceremonies, and belief about the direction of the organization. Activities that assess such conditions can help a group define its own structure more clearly.

Since groups are inherently dynamic in nature, it is critical that effective change management become an integral part of a group's function. Activities dealing with *change management* examine the ability for group members to accept and make changes in a planned and managed or systematic fashion; that is, to plan, initiate, realize, control, and stabilize change.

The ability for group members to expand their thinking in new and innovative ways can take a group to a more competitive level of performance. *Diversity* activities encourage participants to accept and celebrate differences and to recognize the contribution of diverse thoughts and ideas to the group effort.