

GROUP DYNAMICS

I. INTRODUCTION

What is Group Dynamics?

What is the place of Group Dynamics in the Baha'i Community?

References from Baha'i Writings on this subject.

Structure of a Group; Member Roles; Definition of Terms

Conditions for Group Development

II. GROUP BEGINS TO FUNCTION AS A GROUP, AND TO OBSERVE AND MAKE RECORD OF ITS OWN FUNCTIONING

The setting up of aims and goals

Differenti

Content: The dynamics of Baha'i groups

Observers Reports

III. APPLICATION OF GROUP DYNAMICS IN BAHAI GROUP --- Group I

The group -determined program in action

Member participation

Observers record and report

IV. APPLICATION OF GROUP DYNAMICS IN BAHAI GROUP --- Group II

Through interaction, increasing participation

Observers record and report

V. APPLICATION OF GROUP DYNAMICS IN BAHAI GROUP --- Group III

Group program completed

Observers evaluations

Member evaluations

GROUP DYNAMICS

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God Passes By	Principles of Baha'i Admin. (Eng.)
Baha'i Procedure	The Baha'i Community
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RELATING TO GROUP DYNAMICS

GROUPS

B.W.F., p. 401: GOD LOVETH THOSE WHO WORK IN GROUPS "O ye friends of God! Today is the day of union and this age is the age of harmony in the world of existence. 'Verily God loveth those who are working in His path in groups, for they are a solid foundation.' Consider ye that he says 'in groups,' united and bound together, supporting one another, 'to work,' mentioned in this holy verse, does not mean, in this greatest age, to perform it with swords, spears, shafts and arrows, but rather with sincere intentions, good designs, useful advices, divine moralities, beautiful actions, spiritual qualities, educating the public, guiding the souls of mankind, diffusing spiritual fragrances, explaining divine illustrations, showing convincing proofs and doing charitable deeds...When the holy souls, through the angelic power, will arise to show forth these celestial characteristics, establishing a band of harmony, each of these souls shall be regarded as one thousand persons and the waves of this greatest ocean shall be considered as the army of the hosts of the Supreme Concurrence!"

CONSULTATION

B.W.F., p 57: "O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind, and bettereth the condition thereof, if ye be of them that scan heedfully."

B.W.F., p. 406: "In this day, the gathering of a board for consultation is of great importance and a great necessity. For all, obedience to it is a necessity, especially because the members (of it) are the hands of the Cause.

So they (members) must confer and consult in such a way that neither disagreement nor abhorrence may occur. When meeting for consultation, each must use perfect liberty in stating his views and unveiling the proof of his demonstration. If another contradicts him, he must not become excited because if there be no investigation or verification of questions and matters, the agreeable view will not be discovered neither understood. The brilliant light which comes from the collision of thoughts is the "lightener" of facts.

If all views are in harmony at the end of a conference, it will be excellent; but if, God forbid! disagreement occurs, then the decision must be according to the greater number in harmony.

NOTE: apparently better translation of the above can be found in Baha'i Administration p. 21, and in Principles of Baha'i Administration p. 54.

Tab. A.B., Vol. II: "The principle of consultation is the keynote of the collective life of the Baha'i community. The spirit of frank and living consultation is the hope of the future to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice...and the sanctity of the rights of the individual...on the one hand and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other."

B.P., p. 85. "Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique order."

G.P.B., p. 218. "Consultation He establishes as one of the fundamental principles of His Faith; describes it as 'the lamp of guidance,' as 'the bestower of understanding,' and as one of the two 'luminaries' of the 'heaven of divine wisdom.'"

B.Adm., p. 78. "High aims and pure motives, however laudable in themselves, will surely not suffice if unsupported by measures that are practicable and methods that are sound. Wealth of sentiment, abundance of good-will and effort, will prove of little avail if we should fail to exercise discrimination and restraint and neglect to direct their flow along the most profitable channels. The unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice, and the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal

B.W.F., p. 170. "Regards the preservation and protection of the stations of the servants of God. They must not make light of any matter, but speak in truthfulness and sincerity. The people of Baha must not refuse to discharge the due reward of any one, and must respect the possessors of talent..."

INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION

B. Pro., p. 32. "Let us also remember that at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views...Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation.

Nothing short of the spirit of a true Baha'i can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candor, and courage on the other."

B.Com., p 241. "Every subject or problem before an Assembly is most efficiently handled when the following process is observed: first, ascertainment and agreement upon the facts; second, agreement upon the spiritual or administrative Teachings which the question involves; third, full and frank discussion of the matter, leading up to the offering of a resolution; and fourth, voting upon the resolution."

B. Pro., p. 42. "Upon each member of the community lies the obligation to make his or her utmost contribution to the consultation, the ideal being a gathering of Baha'is inspired with one spirit and concentrating upon the one aim to further the interests of the Faith."

B. Adm., p. 55. "And, when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced."

P.U.F., p. 178. "When you assemble you must reflect the lights of the heavenly kingdom. Let your hearts be as mirrors in which the radiance of the Sun of Reality is visible. Each bosom must be a telegraph station; one terminus of the wire attached to the soul, the other fixed in the Supreme Concourse, so that inspiration may descend from the kingdom of Abha and questions of reality be discussed. Then opinions will coincide with truth; day by day there will be progression and the meetings become more radiant and spiritual. This attainment is conditioned upon unity and agreement. The more perfect the love and agreement, the more the divine confirmations and assistance of the Blessed Perfection will descend...In discussions look toward the reality without being self-opinionated. Let no one assert and insist upon his own mere opinion; nay, rather, let each investigate the reality with the greatest love and fellowship. Consult upon every matter and when one presents the point of view of the reality itself, that shall be acceptable to all. Then will spiritual unity increase among you, individual illumination will be greater, happiness more abundant and you will draw nearer and nearer to the kingdom of God.

GROUP DYNAMICS

IN A DEMOCRATIC GROUP

The leadership belongs not to the chairman but to the group.
The group determines what to do and when and how.
Each member is helped to develop to his greatest possibility.

THE GREATEST HANDICAPS TO GROUP GROWTH ARE

dependence upon the chairman or leader.
over-active participation of some members.
non-participation of some members

ANY GROUP CAN IMPROVE ITSELF

if it is aware that it needs to improve.
if it examines itself frankly, to find good and bad features.
if it adopts the necessary techniques for improvement.
if it practices these techniques and evaluates the results.

A GROUP CAN EXAMINE ITSELF BY ASKING QUESTIONS.

How do members behave during group sessions?
How well do members understand one another?
What do members think of one another?
Does the group have clear-cut goals?
Do the members really feel free to be themselves?
How much control is exercised by the leader?

USING AN OBSERVER AS A TECHNIQUE FOR IMPROVEMENT

What does the observer do? He withdraws from active participation in the group so that he can watch the group in action and take notes on what he sees. Whenever the group requests a report, he talks about some of the things he has observed. Why have an observer? The group is stimulated to think about itself and the way it conducts its affairs. It is believed that a group can learn to control its actions and improve itself. The observer holds up a mirror to the group.

HINTS TO THE OBSERVER

You will find it very difficult to take down everything that happens. Therefore do your observing for a while in a single area of observation, such as participation, atmosphere, or leader role. When you gain an understanding in one area, you are ready to move into another. Gradually you will become able to observe many areas at the same time.

What is done is recorded by the secretary, not by you. Your main job is to reflect back to the group how it was done.

One way to observe is to jot down questions. "Why was that done?" "What could have been done there? Why wasn't it?" When you give your report, ask these questions, and expect answers.

Reporting back to the group (usually called "feed back") is as important as the observing itself. Bear in mind that if the group is not ready to hear something you'd better not say it.

Here are some pointers on your first feed backs:

1. You may have noticed some personality clashes, jealousies, hostilities, etc. That's good observing, but you'd better keep such knowledge to yourself for awhile.
2. Do not criticize or attack the group. The group is not used to it and will become defensive and angry at you. That will end your usefulness to the group.
3. Introduce many of your comments with something like: "I wondered about..." or "Could it have been done..."
4. Maintain a good relationship with the group. Do no judging. Be supportive.
5. Start with an area of observation that is least personal, such as participation.

AREA OF OBSERVATION: ATMOSPHERE.

Do the members feel completely free to express themselves?

What is the evidence?

What signs are there of: friendliness, unfriendliness, formality, informality?

What signs of cooperativeness are there? Of competition?

AREA OF OBSERVATION: PARTICIPATION

How lopsided is the participation? Why? Are some too eager? Others not

eager enough? To what extent do the too-eager try to pull in the others?

Are the comments kept to the topic? Brief? Clear? Factual? Emotional?

Do the members listen to one another? Weigh the value of what is said?

To whom are remarks usually addressed?

Were the decisions group decisions? Dictated decisions? Sheep-like decisions?

Area OF OBSERVATION: GOALS

How does the group choose its goals?

To what extent does the group understand what it is trying to do?

To what extent does the group understand why it is trying to do it?

Were all equally interested in the goals?

Was interest maintained or did it lag?

Was there any evidence of willingness to subordinate personal interests to the common goals?

How far did the group get?

AREA OF OBSERVATION: INTER-ACTION WITHIN THE GROUP

- What are the signs of power structure? Status?
- What are the alliances?
- What other kinds of sub-groups are there? (Wise-crackers, etc.)
- What is the purpose of these sub-groups? How do their members work together?
What is the effect on the total group:?
- What understanding is there of the needs of other members?
- How well does the group act as a team?
- How does the group act when it faces a serious decision?
- How do the members react to the decisions when made?

AREA OF OBSERVATION: LEADER ROLE

- How aware is the leader of what is in the minds of members?
- How does he influence group decisions? Deliberately?
- What status does the group give him?
- Is he aware of individual needs?
- Does he become involved emotionally?
- What are the evidences that he is autocratic? Passive? Democratic?

AREA OF OBSERVATION: MEMBER ROLES

- Which members seemed most interested in the way the group was performing? What did they do?
- Which members seemed most interested in the specific problem being discussed? What did they do?
- Which members seemed most interested in themselves? How?
Attention seekers? Monopolists? Non-participants? Distractors?
Hair-splitters? Disruptors? Debunkers?

USING EVALUATION AS A TECHNIQUE FOR IMPROVEMENT

Many groups use an End-of-Meeting Suggestion Slip, which is filled out by each member and given to the observer. At the following meeting the observer "feeds back" the material according to its usefulness.

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END-OF-MEETING SUGGESTION SLIP

What did you think of this meeting? Please be frank. Your comments can contribute a great deal to the success of our meetings.

1. How did you feel about this meeting? (circle one)

No Good Mediocre All right Good Excellent

2. Did you find yourself wanting to say things during the meeting you did not actually say?

Never A few times Fairly often Frequently Very frequently

3. Were there any particular reasons why you did not contribute? If so, please list:

4. What were the strong points:?

5. What improvements would you suggest?

GROUP DYNAMICS

GROUP PROCEDURES

Each Group Member:

- Helps decide on specific problems and ways of working as a group
- Contributes ideas and suggestions related to the problem
- Listens to what other members say and seeks helpful ideas and insights
- Requests clarification when needed
- Observes the group process and makes suggestions
- Assumes various roles as needed

The Leader

- Helps group get acquainted
- Helps group establish ground rules
- Reports results of preconference planning for work of group
- Helps group proceed with planning and deciding
- Calls on group to clarify, analyze, and summarize problems and suggested solutions
- Draws out the "timid soul" and keeps the dominant person from monopolizing
- Knows particular contributions which different persons can make

The Recorder

- Keeps a record of the main problems, issues, ideas, facts, and decisions as they develop in the discussion
- Summarizes points and reports to group from time to time as needed

The Observer

- Gives special attention to group process in respect to:
 - Formation and clarity of goals
 - Degree and kind of participation and interaction
 - Clarity of discussion
 - Effectiveness of leadership
 - Use of resources
 - Progress toward goals
- Helps group decide upon ways of evaluating group process
- Helps group observe and evaluate group process without losing sight of the content of the discussion
- Reports to the group, if asked, regarding observations

HOW DO WE SECURE THE BEST RESULTS?

Each person should do his own thinking. Don't try "to save time" by telling the group the right answer. The leader is not a group instructor but a guide trying to arrange conditions so that each will do creative thinking. Group discussion is not a debating society. We do not argue for the fun of it. The issues are of great importance; wise men disagree in their views; our task is to find more truth than we bring to any group meeting. We are participating in a cooperative quest. Our thinking is creative rather than combative.

Challenge contributions you cannot fully accept. Do not keep your disagreements quiet in the mistaken notion that it is better manners to pretend to agree when you do not. Make inquiry concerning the assumptions involved in the contribution. The "either-or" attitude is on the whole not fruitful. Search rather for new means which enable both sets of values to be pursued without clash. Our concern in cooperative thinking is not simply to choose between two ways we now know, but if possible to find a way to integrating

the value of both, thereby creating an improved solution. However, avoid smoothing over differences. Differences should be probed with questions to make them clear and sharp.

Do not pass any important matter that is not clear to you. Sometimes individuals hear unfamiliar terms and assume that everyone else must understand; hence they fear it would be humiliating to ask for explanations or illustrations. This is untrue. Have you not often been glad when someone else asked for clarification on a point on which you had been none too clear? Others may profit too, but you are in the group to learn, and you must not hesitate to ask.

Use special care to be fair to positions represented by a minority or not represented at all in the group. If you are aware of a position not being adequately represented, present it as its adherents would like to hear it stated, then explain your disagreements.

Be on the lookout for different uses of the same word. Call for illustrations whenever this difference becomes confusing. Do not wrangle over a verbal definition, Ask for a "Such as".

Make discriminate use of short periods of silence. When there is some confusion over a diversity of opinion expressed, a minute of silence can do much to help members rise to a clearer perspective of what has been said. In suggesting this pause, the chairman should restate the precise issue under discussion. After the pause the members may be more able to cooperate in detecting the root of the disagreements. This may be in the partial nature of the experience used, or in a difference in the values. Try to keep in mind some ends everyone wants.

When discussion wanders, restate the question and get a new start. Sometimes, if the side-line is especially important, put it up to the group, "Shall we follow this interesting issue that has come up, or shall we return to the plan of discussion originally adopted?"

Utilize available time to best advantage. For every discussion there is available a limited amount of time. Each individual should help make it possible to utilize the time most effectively. To attempt too much in too short a time fosters a bit of slipshod and superficial thinking.

Do not monopolize the discussion. If you find yourself talking more than other members of the group, train yourself to pass over minor points, and to speak on only a few carefully chosen issues. Make short statements, not speeches.

Stress basic problems and questions. Ask yourself which ideas, experiences, and differences are basic, fundamental, and most worth discussing.

Summarize (1) whenever a major point is finished before going on to the next point; (2) whenever the discussion has been fairly long, drawn out, or confused; (3) shortly before the close of the period. Try to use the words of members of the group, rather than your translation.

The important thing is interaction. Discussion should not be directed toward the leader. No two members of the group should get into a discussion "with each other."

Trust the group. There is no person in it who is not superior to the others in at least one respect. The experience of all is richer than the experience of any one. The group as a whole can see further and more truly than its best member. Remember that every member of the group is an individual just as you are.

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OBSERVER'S SHEET

AREA OF OBSERVATION: ATMOSPHERE

- Are the members free to express themselves?
- Are the members friendly, unfriendly, formal, informal?
- Are the members relaxed? Under tension?
- Do some members possess special prestige? With what results?
- Are there alliances within the group?
- Does the group work as a team or are there factions?

AREA OF OBSERVATION: PARTICIPATION

- Is the participation lopsided?
- Are the comments on the beam? Brief? Clear? Factual? Emotional?
- Do the members listen to one another? Try to pull in the quiet ones?
- Were decisions group decisions? Dictated? Sheep like?

AREA OF OBSERVATION: GOALS

- Does the group choose its goals?
- Does the group proceed logically toward its goals? Go off on tangents?
Distribute time carefully?
- Did interest lag?
- Did members subordinate their personal interests to the common goals?

AREA OF OBSERVATION: LEADER ROLE

- How much influence does he have? How does he get it?
- Does he become involved emotionally?
- How does he help the group reach decisions?
- In what ways is he autocratic? Passive? Democratic?

NOTE TO OBSERVER:

Do not criticize or attack the group. Do not become personal. Maintain a good relationship. Be supportive.

CONTENT OBSERVATION FORM

A. ATMOSPHERE

- Formal or informal
- Competitive or cooperative
- Antagonistic or friendly
- Hiding or sharing
personal feelings
- Fast or slow-moving

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B. MOTIVATION AND UNITY

- Interest level high or low or fluctuating
- Group working together or in splits or as sub-groups

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C. PROGRESS AND PRODUCTIVITY

Detours, blockings, concensus achieved regarding decisions.
How goals set up and how clearly stated
Mutual understandings or misunderstandings.

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D. LEADERSHIP-MEMBERSHIP

How many contributed
How many leadership roles assumed and how these roles were distributed
among members
How many talked too much
How many contributed not at all
How many needed to be urged to contribute
Was there effort made to see that all contributed

Date: _____

OBSERVATION OF GROUP DISCUSSION.

Topic: _____

Steps taken in the discussion:

Contributions of members:

Was the participation general or lopsided?

How did each member serve the group?

Contribution of leader: How did leader serve the group?

Atmosphere: (circle one)

- 1. Formal Informal
- 2. Permissive Inhibited
- 3. Cooperative Inhibited
- 4. Friendly Hostile

Other Comments:

WAYS IN WHICH MEMBERS OF A GROUP MAY ACT

Promote Group Action by:

1. enriching and organizing group thinking
 - a. initiating, proposing
 - b. clarifying, defining
 - c. elaborating
 - d. integrating
2. improving analysis of problem
 - a. fact seeking
 - b. questioning
 - c. giving information
3. Increasing group solidarity and progress
 - a. encouraging
 - b. accepting
 - c. mediating
 - d. self disciplining
 - e. being group's conscience

Retard group action by

1. distracting, (nuisance types)
2. self assertion
3. dominating
4. blocking
5. passive aggression
6. active aggression

