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Leadership and Power

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Introduction

Leadership is an important requirement for social development. We need individuals who can effectively steer groups towards attainment of goals. However, research and experience indicates that good leaders are hard to come by, because of the qualities and abilities leadership demands.

One finds individuals with a natural flair for leadership and also individuals who are trained to be leaders. Both the aspects of being a 'born leader' or a 'trained leader' is feasible, according to behavioural scientists. Some authors believe that individuals with substantial experience in working with groups as members (prior to becoming group leaders) are found to excel in leadership tasks. Thus, leadership is an ability that grows out of partaking. While India has had many charismatic leaders, especially in the political arena, in this material we shall be looking at group leaders and their profiles.

Group Leadership

Leadership is the capacity to motivate a group of individuals towards fulfilment of group's objectives. The capacity to motivate could derive from power that is both formal and informal for formal and informal influence is

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important in leadership. It is widely accepted that leadership can transpire from within a group as well as by formal appointment to lead a group. In social group work, one finds and encourages emergence of leaders from within the group.

Some kind of leadership is present in every group, though it is not definite whether the group is aware of this fact. It is also observed that the type of leadership has an effect on the group. Depending on the objectives, nature, size and composition of the group, leadership needs to evolve.

Group Leadership: A Skill

A skill is an ability that has to be learnt with training and practice. However, there is many a difference between the manual skills required for accomplishment of a task. For instance, the potter making pots out of clay and sand in various shapes and designs requires a different set of skills in comparison to the intellectual skills required for leadership. The potter can work with speed and dexterity to produce 100 pots a day to near perfection, double the speed of a beginner. This is obviously different in the case of acquiring skills towards managing personal and group affairs. The focus is on individual growth and on gaining knowledge – again dependent on enriching the realistic aptitudes. All the way through this learning process the emphasis is on painstaking understanding and forgetting of the self. The leader has to consistently introspect his skills and abilities – the extent to which his approach is stipulated by the expectations of those he wishes to influence, and also by his own individuality.

Theories of Leadership

Several theories on leadership have been developed by researchers studying leader behaviour. The broad basis

of understanding leader behaviour and its theorization has been in the context of:

- Leadership as a trait (inborn quality)
- Leadership as a behaviour (acquired/attained through training)
- Task oriented leadership
- People oriented leadership

Trait Theory

The Trait Theory of leadership focuses on personal qualities and characteristics that differentiate leaders from non leaders. These traits are being charismatic, enthusiastic, and courageous. The following traits are believed to be possessed by leaders: desire to lead, ambition and energy, honesty and integrity, self-confidence, intelligence, high self-monitoring and job-relevant knowledge. Thus, traits can predict leadership. They do a better job in predicting the emergence of leaders and the appearance of leadership in actually distinguishing between effective leaders and ineffective leaders.

However, the fact that an individual exhibits the traits and others consider that person to be a leader does not necessarily mean that the leader is successful at getting his group to achieve its goals.

Behavioural Theories of Leadership

These theories propose that specific behaviours differentiate leaders from non leaders. While Trait theory assumes that leaders are born rather than made, behaviour theory believes that if there were specific behaviours that identified leaders, then leadership could be taught through effective training and other interventions.

Task Orientated Leadership

A task oriented leader is one who defines and structures her role and those of the members towards fulfilment of tasks. She plans, organizes and assigns tasks to group members and insists on its completion within the stipulated time.

People Orientated Leadership

A people oriented leader, on the other hand focuses on relationships in the group, has high concern for the members and their comfort level, emotional well-being and contentment. She is keen on helping members in their personal problems, is approachable and does not discriminate.

Development-oriented Leadership

What is most relevant to social group work leadership is the development-oriented leader – the one who values experimentation, seeks new ideas, and generates and implements change. In a changing world, effective leaders need to exhibit development-oriented behaviour.

Heresy and Blanchard's Situational Theory

This theory looks at leadership through centering on the followers. Leadership, according to this theory is dependent on the follower's willingness to execute the task in question. If the follower is:

a) incapable and reluctant to take up the assigned task, the leader has to provide precise and exact directions to this effect

b) incapable but prepared to take up the assigned task, the leader has to firstly compensate for the follower's lack of ability and relationship orientation and also provide precise directions

c) capable but reluctant the leader has to be helpful and play an active part in task accomplishment

d) capable and enthusiastic then the leader's role is minimal

Path-goal Theory of Leadership

This theory stipulates that the prime responsibility of the leader lies in helping the members to reach their objectives and that individual goal and group goals are complementary. It is the leader's job to assist followers in attaining their goals and to provide the necessary direction and/or support to ensure that their goals are compatible with the overall objectives of the group. The term path-goal is derived from the belief that effective leaders clarify the path to help their followers get from where they are to the achievement of their work goals and to make the journey along the path easier by reducing roadblocks.

Understanding Leadership Styles

While there are various leadership styles, it is generally agreed that leadership styles is in accordance with the circumstances – the ability of members, urgency of the situation and many such crucial factors. The following are a few important leader behaviours:

Directive

When the task to be accomplished is unclear or difficult to be achieved, the leader ensures its successful accomplishment through clearly defining individual tasks and role expectations of members. His intervention is meaningful in such instances. However, this style may not be suitable where the tasks in question are well defined and easy to attain.

Supportive

The leader shows high concern towards group members and their needs. This style is suitable for groups working on well defined tasks. Members under the supportive leader are found to be happy and highly satisfied.

Participative

Here, the leader involves the group members in decision making and in all functions of the group. Discussions, consultations and group consensus are stressed upon. However, this calls for members who are responsible and who understand the importance of their contribution to the group's success.

Charismatic

Medha Patkar pioneer of the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada Movement) is considered to be a charismatic leader for the following reasons: (i) ability to inspire followers towards goals that appears incredible to the common man (ii) vision about the future (iii) understanding followers' needs and limitations.

Transformational

"This highlights on leaders who inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests and who are capable of having a profound and extraordinary effect on followers. Seven characteristics were found: sincerity of the leader; bonding – effort to develop the organization as a family by personalized relationships; consultation and participation; collectivization and teamwork; empowerment and support; serving as a role model; bringing in changes continuously while maintaining continuity and being innovative" Robbins & Sanghi: 2005.

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness

Individuals, especially leaders, who engage in social interface, are expected to emotionally intelligent. Leaders low in emotional intelligence are found to be less capable of handling stress, problematic situations and people. What constitutes emotional intelligence?

The five components of Emotional Intelligence

Self-awareness: exhibited by self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and a self-depreciating sense of humour

Self-management: exhibited by trustworthiness and integrity, comfort with ambiguity, and openness to change

Self-motivation: exhibited by a strong drive to achieve, optimism, and high organizational commitment

Empathy: exhibited by expertise in building and retaining talent, cross-cultural sensitivity, and service to clients

Social Skills: exhibited by the ability to lead change, persuasiveness and expertise in building and leading teams

Robbins & Sanghi: 2005

Factors Influencing Group Leadership

A group leader has to shoulder many responsibilities and facilitate the group in task accomplishments. Many a times he needs to face challenges and has to exhibit qualities that inspire the group. The vital factors influencing leadership are given below:

Acknowledging the Importance of the Leadership Role

The leader has to possess a strong conviction and definiteness about the vitality of the role assigned or volunteered for. Being apprehensive about the usefulness of group and its objective would make leadership a burden.

Group Spokesperson

The group leader is a spokesperson for the group – both within and outside the group. She is the group representative and has to possess good knowledge of the group – its purpose, composition, size, history, past and current activities. Therefore the leader should determine what the group is trying to achieve, its progress inclusive of pace and path of progress and the ability to enlighten the group members and the outsiders about the group's purpose whenever the need arises.

Qualities of A Successful Leader

Though there are several leadership styles, every leader has to develop a style appropriate to the needs of the group and the situation. It is a universal fact that every person's leadership skills are unique and cannot be borrowed from another. The leader has to grow on her own.

To be a good leader one needs to have a positive sense of humour that is not derogatory or distasteful, possess good listening skills, ability to truly enjoy being with people and genuinely accepts the other person's view points. ***The leader has to be optimistic, unruffled and capable of handling difficult situations deftly.***

The leader has to be ***friendly – within the prescribed limits of the societal norms***. This friendliness has to be done with appropriateness – not too close or too isolated. Essentially, the leader has to be broad minded, relaxed

and open to criticisms. However, she cannot afford to be silent to criticisms that are not related to the job or damaging her image.

While working with group members from diverse cultures, a broad cultural background is an advantage. This aids the process of the cultural 'melting pot' further enabling smooth interaction and accomplishment of group tasks.

The leader is a human being too, with all her problems and fears to handle. But a wise leader fully understands that it is essential to keep her problems, especially the personal ones to herself. Making the group members listeners to these aspects, the good leader knows is only self-damaging. Burdening the members with personal difficulties is detrimental to the leaders' functioning. ***The leader has to necessarily control her emotion, temper and has to be extra cautious of imposing her feelings on the group.***

Finally, the leader has to be well groomed physically too. The leader has to stick to comfortable, clean outfits, well kept hair, no clattering trinkets, flashy colours, heavy costumes or any disturbing accompaniments. The leader has to make sure that his appearance is appropriate to the group's culture and expectations. He has to avoid improper mannerisms and gestures. In short, ***by staying poised and collected, the leader makes the group too fall in line.***

Leadership and Decision Making

Indecisiveness is a silent killer that robs the group of efficiency, resulting in dismantling of the group and its purpose. It is very important for the group to come to a consensus, and decide on its key issues to enable successful accomplishment of its goals. A decision could

be arrived at through group's brainstorming, discussion and dialogue depending on the time available, the complexity of the problem and the group members' capacity.

A leader has to make the group understand that it is important to finalize goals that are achievable and apposite to the groups' capacity and resources. Being pushy can lead to unrealistic targets that could lead the group to collapse.

Decision making is necessary to assign responsibilities to group members. It also is an important aspect of problem solving processes. A leader's uphill task lies in ensuring completion of assignments that the members had agreed to.

While persuading her group members to arrive at a decision, the leader has to exercise the skill of appropriateness; the sense of timing – realizing when to take hold of an issue and when to let go. Realizing that the group is in a position to go ahead, the leader shall seize the opportunity to press hard for a decision. There could also be occasions when the ideal thing to do could be to motivate the group to ascertain further facts prior to the decision.

"The leader allows himself to be put in a difficult position whenever he uses steam roller tactics to secure a particular course of action. By doing this against the group's better judgment, he assumes full responsibility for the possible failure of action. The group members learn from this that it is all right for them not to take responsibility. Moreover, if failure results, they learn that the leader is untrustworthy, and their motivation to participate in the next action sinks. Finally, the (often unconscious) resentment of the leader, which certainly is to be expected, is likely to sabotage the action so that it will be a failure.

To put it another way, the leader's job is to set and maintain the conditions required for the group's maximum intelligence to assert itself. If everyone leaves a meeting with the justifiable feeling that he could have reached a better decision in five minutes all by himself, then leadership has failed" Toseland, W.R., & Rivas, F. R. (2005).

Leadership and Communication

A leader is expected to communicate effectively with everybody. While one to one communication is also important, the leader's capacity to communicate with the group as a whole is most vital. This is one skill that is indispensable for a good leader. The leader is a good interpreter and proud voice for her group. She is ready, able, and willing to explain clearly its purpose to persons who may not be familiar with it. She can do it in simple language and in so doing increases his own skill in social communication.

The leader is expected to persuade the not so vocal members to converse freely. Some members will find it difficult to partake in discussions for very many reasons. This could be fear of speaking among a group of individuals, being unsure as to how their ideas would be received; difficulty in choosing the appropriate words and inexperience in putting forth their ideas. Managing poor participation of members (due to their problems in communicating) is a significant aspect the leader will have to tackle through persuasion and also by setting a personal example.

In meetings, the leader is expected to make people comfortable and at ease with one another. By doing so, she facilitates easy flow of interaction and positive exchange of ideas between the members.

During discussions it is important for the group leader not to putforth her views before the other members have done so. For, too early a viewpoint from the leader would possibly be opposed or accepted by all members present – keeping with the trend of 'safely supporting the leader'.

Listening is an important aspect of communication. The leader needs to be a good listener, who through her effective listening encourages members to speak without hesitation or inhibitions. Experience indicates that the time available before and after the conduct of group meetings is a key opportunity for getting a true picture about the status of issues and the group's functioning.

Bonding and Relationship

The leader has an affirmative outlook of the group. Bonding and relationship building are vital ingredients to successful accomplishment of group goals. The following are some ways in which a leader can bond her team:

- Focusing on the positive aspects of the group members and also the situation instead of spreading despair through looking at the negative face of issues

- Firmly believing in the democratic approach in group dealings; for finding solutions and for arriving at decisions

- Zealously learning from other people and amending her ways of thinking on the basis of combined experience and thinking of the group members

- Sensitivity to the differences in capacities, ideas, approaches of individual group members thereby enabling their optimum contribution to the group's functioning.

- Acknowledging that groups are different and that she needs to develop understanding of group members and helping each individual to become a part of the group.

- Following the principle 'praise in public and reprimand in private' to the fullest extent; prompt and consistent appreciation for the good work of all members that ensures motivation and satisfaction among the members

- Handling problems of individual behaviour and personal relationships without letting it hamper the groups' functioning

- Impressing on the group that individuals are diverse and that their diversity is the group's most priceless plus

- Finding and maintaining conditions that facilitate optimum contribution of each group member

Leadership then is concerned with the discovery and coordination of member resources, on the assumption that individuals are not equal and that their differences are the group's most valuable asset.

Leadership and Power

Power refers to the worker's resources for changing conditions inside and outside the group. Actual power depends on the sources of a worker's influence. The power bases described by French and Raven (1959) follow:

- Connection power – being able to call on and use influential people or resources

- Expert power – having the knowledge or skill to facilitate the work of the group

- Information power – possessing information that is valuable to and needed by others

- Legitimate power – holding a position of authority and the rights that accrue to that position in the organization or larger social system

- Reference power – being liked and admired; the group members want to be identified with the worker

- Reward power – being able to offer social or tangible rewards

- Coercive power – being able to sanction, punish, or deny access to resources and privileges

Power and leadership are largely interconnected. The effective leader understands that legitimate power and influence are needed to direct the group, especially at the initial stages when the group looks up to the leader for guidance. The leader has to take up a mature use of power rather than being uncomfortable or too much in control. This power should be used to empower the group towards shouldering responsibilities willingly and also in successfully completing them. Groups need leaders to avoid disorganization and chaos; leadership and power are inseparable (Etzioni, 1961). The leader needs to aid power-sharing with the group by highlighting the importance of member-to-member communication rather than member-to-leader communication.

Handling Group's Problems

Generally, leadership is a smooth journey if the things are going well, but there are many instances when the going is not smooth. However, it is true that brooding or becoming hurt easily does not in any way help leadership assignments.

The group and the leader have to internalize two facts to move ahead successfully (i) it is normal for problems to occur while working as a group and (ii) almost every group has in some point of time gone through such troubles

Eight Commandments for A Group Leader

The Leader

- Understands that the focal point of effective group leadership lies firmly grounded in human relationships

- Shapes a comfortable work atmosphere, both psychologically and physically for the members, making happy working together feasible

- Accepts the group as it is and moves at the pace of the members rather than making the group uncomfortable with a different one

- Realizes the need for clarity in group objectives among all the members through appropriate initiatives

- Facilitates group members to work in unison for accomplishment of group goals

- Constantly self-introspects – objectively and is aware of her strengths and weaknesses; develops the ability to be stable in the face of praise and attack alike

- Takes the group along with her in all times; encouraging the group to express its opinions and viewpoints freely by apposite interventions

- Does not permit scapegoating of any member by the other members during crisis situations or during hostile encounters

Conclusion

To conclude research studies and experience in working with groups indicates that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to leadership. Different styles of leadership are relevant to different situations. Leadership skills are dependent to a large extent on the extent to which the group can operate independently. Obviously, the less independent the group, more the leader's role and strategies and vice versa – ultimately the leader looks forward to developing leadership from within the group.

Thus, effective leaders are highly respected individuals who have a vision. They promote safe, welcoming environments that avoid the extremes of aggressive confrontation of members or passive abdication of leadership to members who attempt to dominate groups (Kivlighan & Tarrant, 2000; Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallai, 2001). Next, leaders have to understand the abilities, values, and personalities of members. They use this understanding to encourage and guide members as they contribute to group goal attainment, while at the same time helping members to satisfy their own needs and achieve their own personal goals. Effective leaders must also skillfully deploy the resources they have at their disposal. This includes empowering members and reinforcing feeling of confidence and individual and group efficacy (Bandure, 1995, 1997b). It also includes making sure that the group engages in good information processing and decision making, so that when resources are deployed, the environmental demands on members and the group are carefully considered (Chemers, 2000). In a very real sense the right to leadership must be earned again and again.

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Skills and Techniques of Social Group Work

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Introduction

A social worker has to understand and imbibe skills of social group work. It would be one of his or her major tasks in the job as social work often involves work with groups differing in its size and composition. What is a skill? "The term skill refers to a conscious, disciplined use of one's self and one's abilities which can be acquired reliably only through the disciplined experience of professional training for social group work, during which the potential group worker not only takes help in his learning from teachers and supervisors but carries responsibility in a group work agency simultaneous with his acquisition of group work theory. On the one hand the social worker has to understand his profession's philosophic values and also draw from social work's professional purposes. These are the roots of social group work skill. The capacity to translate values into professional efforts that precipitate movement toward the fulfillment of purpose constitutes social group work skill." (Philips: 1957).

Roles of the Group Worker

A group worker plays two vital roles while working with groups: as a member and as a leader switching roles as

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and when tasks emerge. Membership and leadership skills are viewed jointly due to the following rationale:

For the group's efficient functioning, the leader and his members need to be dealt with skillfully.

Similar concerns of individualistic communication emerge for leaders and members.

A group worker has to perform various functions which are broadly grouped into (i) job oriented functions that facilitate the group to converge and concentrate towards fulfilling group's objectives (ii) individual oriented functions to cater to the personal needs of group members that ensure healthy group cohesiveness and (iii) maintenance oriented functions that ensure the consistency of group members' contribution.

Skills and Techniques of Group Work

According to Trecker (1955), skill is the capacity to apply knowledge and understanding to a given situation. Trecker (1955: 36-37) also has specified skills for social group work as follows:

1) **Skill in Establishing Purposeful Relationships**

   A) The group worker must be skillful in gaining the acceptance of the group and in relating himself to the group on a positive professional basis.

   B) The group worker must be skillful in helping individuals in the group to accept one another and to join with the group in common pursuits

2) **Skill in Analyzing the Group Situation**

   A) The group worker must be skillful in judging the developmental level of the group to determine what the level is, what the group needs, and how quickly

the group can be expected to move. This calls for skill in direct observation of groups as a basis for analysis and judgment.

B) The group worker must be skillful in helping the group to express ideas, work out objectives, clarify immediate goals, and see both its potentialities and limitations as a group.

3) **Skill in Participation with the Group**

A) The group worker must be skillful in determining, interpreting, assuming and modifying his own role with the group.

B) The group worker must be skillful in helping group members to participate, to locate leadership among themselves, and to take responsibility for their own activities.

4) **Skill in Dealing with Group Feeling**

A) The group worker must be skillful in controlling his own feelings about the group and must study each new situation with a high degree of objectivity.

B) The group worker must be skillful in helping groups to release their own feelings, both positive and negative. He must be skillful in helping groups to analyze situations as a part of the working through of group or intergroup conflicts.

5) **Skill in Programme Development**

A) The group worker must be skillful in guiding group thinking so that interests and needs will be revealed and understood.

B) The group worker must be skillful in helping groups to develop programs which they want as a means through which their needs may be met.

6) **Skill in Using Agency and Community Resources**

   A) The group worker must be skillful in locating and then acquainting the group with various helpful resources which can be utilized by them for program purposes

   B) The group worker must be skillful in helping individual members to make use of specialized services by means of referral when they have needs which cannot be met within the group.

7) **Skill in Evaluation**

   A) The group worker must have skill in recording the developmental processes that are going on as he works with the group.

   B) The group worker must be skillful in using his records and in helping the group to review its experiences as a means of improvement.

Thus, the social group worker has many skills to master, but the important ones are discussed below:

Skills in Building Group Cohesiveness

The group worker must know his group members – their strengths, capacities, fears, problems and roles they can play in the group's progress. The following are the other factors the worker needs to concentrate upon in building himself within the group:

- Effective rapport building with the group members; to get on the same wave length with people easily and quickly

- Winning the confidence and trust of people by accepting members as they are and enabling them to see the worth of every job that has to be done in the group large or small

- Establishing a good working relationship, based on friendship and mutual confidence that would facilitate influence over the group members

- Ability to avoid splinter groups, especially sub groupism by empathizing and thinking for all the group members. The group worker has to be cautious to interpret the silence of the group members. Silence always does not denote negative aspects; it could just indicate the individuals' hesitation.

- Skill to remain cool and composed while listening to the distasteful – understanding and internalizing the fact that two people can look at the same thing and look at it differently. It is important that the worker has to strengthen his inner self without getting upset or hitting back at unpleasantness of the group. He needs to understand that this is in light of the larger good of the group.

- Capacity to get the group to willingly shoulder responsibilities rather than taking up all the burden on himself – the ability to segregate works that can be delegated and executing those which are best done by the worker.

Facilitation Skills

This involves the group worker helping the group to stay focused on the goals to be achieved, to ensure that the group members work towards a common direction. Facilitating skill, also sometimes called the "here-and-now" of group interaction is often missed by the group workers. This is because group processes take a back seat when group interactions are intense. Also, at times the group worker may hesitate to intervene during a lively yet dispersed discussion.

However, the group worker has to acquire this skill to enable spirited group accomplishments. To help a group accomplish the goals it has set for itself, the worker will often find it helpful to guide the group's interaction in a particular direction. By limiting or blocking a group member's communications, by encouraging another member to speak or by linking one group member's communication to those of other group members, the worker can guide the group's interaction patterns. This method has been referred to as selecting communications patterns purposely (Middleman & Wood, 1990).

Helping the group maintain its focus can promote efficient work by reducing irrelevant communications and by encouraging a full exploration of issues and problems. The group worker does this by minimizing unwanted interactions and by stirring optimum search investigation of concerns and tight spots.

Skills of Information Collection and Evaluation

Information is power and this is true in working with groups too. It is handy in impacting communiqué designs in the group. Through information gathering and evaluation skills, the group worker bridges the gap between the process-oriented approach of facilitating group processes and the task oriented approach of using action skills to achieve goals and satisfy members' needs. Without effective data gathering and assessment skills, workers' interventions are not ground in a complete understanding of the situation. This can result in the use of premature, oversimplified, or previously attempted solutions that have not been carefully analyzed and weighed.

Requesting Information, Questioning and Probing

By skillfully questioning and probing the group worker may gather data effectively. A broad outlook to the task in question and to the pursuits of the group could be added

(with this supplementary information) that could benefit the group immensely. Skills are needed in properly wording the questions – leading questions; double questions etc should be avoided. The questions need to extract information that is clear and precise. Care should be taken while dealing with sensitive issues and concerns.

Analyzing Skills

Once the data have been gathered and organized, the worker can use analyzing skills to synthesize the information and assess how to proceed. Analyzing skills include:

- Pointing out patterns in the data,

- Identifying gaps in the data, and

- Establishing mechanisms or plans for obtaining data to complete an assessment.

Synthesizing Skills

Another useful data gathering and assessment skill is blending verbal and nonverbal communications. Examples of synthesizing skills include:

- Making connections among the meanings behind a member's actions or words, expressing hidden agendas

- Making implicit feelings or thoughts explicit

- Making connections between communications to point out themes and trends in member's actions or words

Synthesizing skills can be useful in providing feedback to members about how they are perceived by others.

Listening Skills

We convey our listening skills verbally and non verbally. By appropriate feedback and playback the group worker

conveys verbally whereas through his eye contact, gestures and body language he conveys it non verbally. Egan (2002) suggests that, in addition to body position and eye contact, skills that indicate that a worker has heard and understood a member are part of effective listening. Research has shown that effective listening skills are an important characteristic of successful leaders (Johnson & Bechler, 1998). Effective listening skills include repeating or paraphrasing what a member says and responding empathically and enthusiastically to the meaning behind members' communications. They also include what Middleman (1978) has referred to as 'scanning' skills. When scanning the group, the worker makes eye contact with all group members, which lets them know that the worker is concerned about them as individuals. Scanning also helps reduce the tendency of workers to focus on one or two group members.

Reframing and Redefining

Often, one of the greatest obstacles to the work of a group or an individual is failure to view a problem from different perspectives that block attempts to find a creative solution (Clark, 1998). Redefining and reframing the problem can help members examine the problem from a new perspective. Thus, a worker may want to reframe or redefine an issue or concern facing the group.

Action Skills

This includes modeling, role playing and rehearsing situations in the group. Action skills can be helpful in both task and treatment groups. Modeling refers to the worker or a member demonstrating behaviors in a particular situation so that others in the group can observe what to do and how to do it. Role playing refers to having group members act out a situation with each other's help. The two primary purposes of role playing are to assess

members' skill in responding to an interpersonal situation and to help members improve particular responses. Responses can be improved through feedback, rehearsal of a new response, or coaching (Etcheverry, Siporin, & Toseland, 1987). Role playing can be a very useful tool when trying to help members improve responses to stressful situations.

Rehearsing refers to practicing a new behavior or response based on the feedback received after a role play. Because it is difficult to learn new behaviors or to diminish less adaptive but habituated behavior patterns, a member may have to practice a new response several times.

Confrontation Skills

From handling conflicts and resistance to enthusing group members, confrontation skills could be a valuable tool for the group worker. Confrontation is the ability to clarify, examine, and challenge behaviors to help members overcome distortions and discrepancies among behaviors, thoughts, and feelings (Egan, 2002; Toseland & Spielberg, 1982). However, one has to vigilantly judge the state of affairs and about the acceptability of his interventions during confronting situations. He has to be fully aware that confrontations are forceful, emotionally charged and also anticipate strong responses. Since confrontations often involve indicating members' mistakes and limitations, the worker has to prepare the group for a candid examination on these lines by underlining the fact that ultimately such discussions aid in identifying potentials and abilities of the group.

Skills of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution skills are needed to smoothen out frictions within the group and also with those outside the group – inclusive of social systems. There could be several

grounds for conflicts among the members. The group worker should facilitate the group to consider conflicts as a factor nourishing the group's development. Conflicts, if constructive and issue based, help the group to get a clearer vision of its goals and discover individual strengths and weaknesses. It is well known that conflicts are bound to happen; through efficient group facilitation, conflicts could be minimized and antagonistic disagreements avoided.

Critiquing Skills

Constructive criticism is an important skill for the worker, for lots of learning happens while critiquing the group's progression and activities. It enables retaining the focus on the group's primary purpose. It also means appropriate questioning of the leader's inputs and interventions, contribution of members and patterns of group's functioning. Critiquing by members is healthier and many a times anticipates and prevents flaws.

Leadership Skills

This is a vital skill that is disputed by researchers – is leadership a trait or a behavior? Is a leader born or made? Despite differing views, it has been proved beyond doubt that leadership skill can be learned. However, there is no 'one size fits all' solution to mastering leadership skills. Group leaders have to constantly remind themselves that they are working with human beings each with different viewpoints, personalities and ways of functioning.

The key skill of the leader is communicating and keeping communication channels open within the group at all times. This means the leader has to involve all members in discussions – the quiet ones, the ones who may not be comfortable talking in groups or those who can be easily silenced. The other key skills of leadership are:

- Consensus seeking

- Gate keeping

- Setting standards

- Self understanding that leads to enhanced communiqué

- Inter-personal understanding that leads to understanding members' viewpoints

- Preventing disruptive behaviour such as diverting, blocking, dominating, silence, attention seeking, sympathy seeking etc

How to Acquire Group Work Skills?

Reach out and ascertain the qualities of individuals who are successful in working with groups. By checking yourself against this list of traits you could perhaps figure out where you stand with regard to working with groups. The most important point to be kept in mind is that no one individual shall possess all the qualities and that all of us can endeavour to imbibe them.

Keenly observing democratic leadership styles in action and understanding reasons behind all the reverence and influence these individuals possess over their groups. Experience shows that it is worthwhile observing good presiding officers and good discussion leaders. Do not stop with observation, but do take hold of the skills of competent leaderships.

Reading relevant material from libraries, authenticated websites, journals, reports etc will keep you updated on the latest in the field.

Maintaining a dairy of everyday work with the group gives a written documentation for reference. It indicates the areas for improvement, when reviewed periodically. It is a tool for self evaluation if done methodically and with honesty.

Interacting with social work fraternity and with group workers in professional forums such as workshops, seminars, conferences, training programmes etc facilitates interchange of ideas and experiences in working with groups. It is a practical knowledge bank and feeds the group worker with skills largely demanded in the field.

Gain hands on training through observing a group or by becoming a member of an existing group.

Lastly, by lending a hand to others to acquire group work skills, one can constantly check and reinvent oneself about the skills needed in working with groups.

Conclusion

Thus group work skills described above are vital for successfully working with groups. The group worker needs confidence, love for people and a belief in team work to accomplish his task. For, "great people are those who make others feel that they too, can become great".

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<div align="center">**11**</div>

Relevance of Life Skills Education in Social Group Work

<div align="right">*R. Nalini*</div>

Introduction

Life Skills Education was evolved to equip individuals, especially the adolescents, with the aptitude to face life with its challenges and opportunities, successfully. "In the recent years enthusiasm for education about health and social issues has been growing in communities around the world. Though recognized by different names – "life skills", "life skills based education", "skills based health education" or "health and family life education" the central idea is shared: young people, especially girls and young women, regularly face risks that threaten their health and limit their learning opportunities. Life skills based education can endow girls with skills to manage challenging situations, particularly in the context of supportive communities and environments. Around the world, life skills based education is being adopted as a means to empower young people in challenging situations. It refers to an interactive process of teaching and learning which enables learners to acquire knowledge and to develop attitudes and skills that support the adoption of healthy behaviours. It is also a critical element in UNICEF's definition of quality education".http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7308.html

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Understanding Life Skills Education

Life skills are problem solving ways fittingly and conscientiously employed in the regulation of our daily dealings. Found in the principles of experiential adult learning, life skills could be split into trainable, workable, components and taught to group members. Life Skills could be utilized in all of the 5 areas of our lives (self, family, job/school, leisure and community) lessons and programmes can be designed to meet the specific needs of a wide range of client groups.

Thus, Life Skills Education can be employed to take up a broad range of subjects that concern youngsters and its coverage is not restricted to a specific milieu. According to UNICEF, "life skills based education is behaviour change or behaviour development approach designed to address a balance of three areas: knowledge, attitude and skills".

The term life skills refers to a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life. Life skills may be directed toward personal actions and actions toward others, as well as actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to health. It includes items intended not only to deal with young people's personal identity but also to encourage them to reject, where they feel this is appropriate, comments on their behaviour which they believe is untrue. http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7308.html

Life Skills Education Groups

A Life Skills Education programme is conducted with a group of participants led by a trained group worker.

Whatever the type of group (occupation, youngsters, health, professional development) members begin with various skills and with varying capacities to utilize those skills. Gradually, by self-awareness and assessment of their skill levels, the members learn to assess their needs and focus on aspirations. Group members of Life Skills Education programme are expected (i) to cultivate the aptitude to draw from a gamut of problem-solving behaviours (ii) to face the tribulations of daily life with self-confidence and (iii) to grow to be well-adjusted, self-determined citizens.

Group Worker's Role in Life Skills Education

A group worker is a trained professional, (mostly in social work) equipped with the knowledge, skill and experience in handling Life Skills Education programmes and also in working effectively with groups. He/She should be confident in dealing with a wide range of clients, not necessarily with problems but also those who seek to develop their personalities. A group worker facilitates group members of a Life Skills Education programme to:

- Periodically self-introspect, with honesty

- Think more productively

- Understand that they are not alone in their challenges and struggles

- Perceive and comprehend their ways of thinking

- Equip themselves with and utilize problem solving skills

- Balance their intellectual, physical and emotional requirements

- Build on apposite ambitions

The Life Skills Education Programme

Across the globe, Life Skills Education programmes are gaining grounds. However, keeping in mind the varying cultures and the equally varying demands of life skills accordingly, the components of the Life Skills Education have been deliberately kept broad and generic. "There is no definitive list of life skills. The list below includes the psychosocial and interpersonal skills generally considered important. The choice of and emphasis on different skills will vary according to the topic and local conditions (example decision making may feature strongly in HIV/ AIDS prevention whereas conflict management may be more prominent in a peace education programme). Many skills are used simultaneously in practice. Ultimately, the interplay between the skills is what produces powerful behavioural outcomes, especially where this approach is supported by other strategies such as media, policies and health services". http://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7308.html

However, the World Health Organization has specified life skills for the youth in order to enable broad guidelines for life skills educators and professionals. "The World Health Organization (WHO) laid emphasis on LIFE SKILLS, which are necessary to all youth alike across the globe. In 1997 the WHO addressed this issue and a well-researched package of Life Skill Development was produced. "Life Skills are living skills or abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with demands and challenges of everyday life" (WHO 1997). The following are the ten generic skills the Life Skills Education hopes to transfer. They are five pairs of related skills.

Critical Thinking: It is the ability to analyse information and experience in an objective manner.

Creative Thinking: It is an ability that helps us look beyond our direct experience and address issues in a perspective which is different from the obvious or the norm. It adds novelty and flexibility to the situation of our daily life. It contributes to problem solving and decision making by enabling us to explore available alternatives and various consequences of our actions or non-actions.

Decision-Making: The process of making assessment of an issue by considering all possible/available options and the effects different decision might have on them.

Problem Solving: Having made decisions about each of the options, choosing the one which is the best suited, following it through the process again till a positive outcome of the problem is achieved.

Interpersonal Relationship: It is a skill that helps us to understand our relations with others and relate in a positive/reciprocal manner with them. It helps us to maintain relationship with friends and family members and also be able to end relationships constructively.

Effective Communication: It is an ability to express ourselves both verbally and non-verbally in an appropriate manner. This means being able to express desires, opinions, and fears and seek assistance and advice in times of need.

Coping with Emotions: It is an ability, which involves recognizing emotions in others, and ourselves, being aware of how emotions influence behaviours and being able to respond to emotions appropriately.

Coping with Stress: It is an ability to recognize the source of stress in our lives, its effect on us and acting in ways that help to control our levels of stress. This may involve

taking action to reduce some stress for example changes in physical environment, life styles, learning to relax etc.

Self-Awareness: Includes our recognition of ourselves, our character, strengths and weaknesses, desires and dislikes. It is a pre-requisite for effective communication, interpersonal relationship and developing empathy.

Empathy: Is an ability to imagine what life is like for another person even in a situation that we may not be familiar with. It helps us to understand and accept others and their behaviour that may be very different from ourselves.

It is evident that the Life Skills are comprehensive including various areas like Thinking, Behaviour, and Emotions. The final target being self-awareness, self-esteem and accepting of others. In an individual, Life Skills develop over the years continuously in an active manner. There are many skills, which are needed to successfully negotiate each and every interaction". http://www.leadership. fau.edu/ICSE12006/ Papers/Pai.doc

The Indian Scenario

"In the Indian-Scenario considering the heterogeneity of the levels of childcare givers ranging from school teachers to grass root level NGO workers, the need of training are varied. The Indian Youth is currently at crossroads. India being a vast and diverse country, The Indian Youth is slowly undergoing a cultural transition in their outlook due to globalization, communication and media. 40 per cent of the one billion population of India are below the age of 16. Adolescents form about 10 per cent to 15 per cent of the population. In absolute numbers the Indian youth are a significant population of the world's youth population. On an average 40 per cent of the Indian adolescents are not

in school, those in school are under severe stress due to a very competitive system of evaluation, heavy syllabus, and a low teacher – student ratio. Due to the above reasons motivation to stay in the schools system is very low especially in the rural areas". http://www.leadership. fau.edu/ICSE12006/Papers/Pai.doc

However, after the Central Board of Secondary Education asked schools to ensure social well-being of children, teaching life skills now forms an integral part of the curriculum of almost all schools. Several life skills trainers, comprising of social workers, psychologists, school teachers, Human Resource (HR) specialists, and like minded professionals are engaging actively in Life Skills Education of varied clientele in India. Schools across the country and NGOs working with non school goers are the prime providers of Life Skills Education programmes, mainly catering to adolescents.

The contents of a Life Skills Education programme organized for school children in a rural Indian school are listed below:

- Learning about society

- Focusing on the family

- Reproductive health and related information

- Environment

- Current trends – changing social and economic realities

- Relating to others

- Self development

The sessions were put together in such a way that gender figured as the centre spread in all the themes that were taken up for discussion. The programme

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was designed to enable the school students to think critically about the world they find themselves in. The programme wanted to create an awakening in the minds of the students that they are the makers of their lives. They wanted to inculcate in them the habit of introspection so that they have an insight about themselves. At the end of the programme, the trainers found themselves responding to a deep need for information, counseling and understanding in the student population.

Need for Life Skills Education

Acquiring Life Skills is a process that happens during an individual's developmental years. As we all know, physical growth and development of mental faculties are two vital aspects to be fulfilled by any human being. Physical growth is visible to the naked eye in the form of height and weight, hair growth, and other noticeable changes in the child. Development is however, rather complicated involving multifaceted aspects.

Life skills calls for comprehending and equipping oneself in a different spheres of personality development such as (i) social skills (ii) interpersonal skills (iii) communication skills (iv) emotional stability (v) scholarly abilities and (vi) empathy/sensitivity to others. A child's development in all these areas is largely shaped by the environment and the adults (parents, teachers, relatives) with whom he or she interacts on a daily basis. This process continues in adulthood also and friends and peer group have an important role in an individual mastering the life skills. The ultimate aim of life skills is to enable the all-round development of an individual who will be able to face challenges and troubles with the right attitude and through appropriate problem solving techniques, cope with life's pressures and traumas. It is very important that the

foundation for acquiring these life skills is laid at the right age and time. Life Skills Education is thus needed for equipping adolescents and young adults with the abilities, knowledge and aptitude to take on life with self-esteem, confidence and self-determination.

Techniques of Learning Life Skills Education

As evident from our discussion above, Life Skills are applied to various aspects of life. This includes (i) Interpersonal Relationships (ii) Understanding one's rights and responsibilities (iii) Promoting Good Health (iv) Mental Health (v) Prevention of HIV/AIDS, STD (vi) Prevention of Substance Abuse (vii) Self Development (viii) Preventing suicides and (ix) Promoting Peace

To achieve this goal of imparting Life Skills Education, various methods and techniques are used by the trainers. This includes (i) Vigorous training (ii) Functioning in small groups (iii) Brainstorming (iv) Play-acting (v) Empirical education (vi) Games and deliberations and (vii) Homework

The aim of Life Skills Education is to enable the group members to develop their aptitudes in exploring alternatives when faced with challenges. A group member on attending Life Skills Education programme should be able to communicate effectively; be assertive (the capacity to stay balanced between aggression and submission); assess pros and cons and arrive at logical decisions.

It also provides environment education, consumer education, education in socio-cultural issues and peace education. Finally, the significance of Life Skills Education is that it empowers group members in taking positive actions, promoting healthy social relationships and in building confidence in self.

Social Group Work and Education

Social group work is a primary method of social work that utilizes the group as a conduit of goal accomplishment. Group work enables its members to bring about desired changes in their life, through collective efforts. Groups, comprising of people from varied backgrounds are social worker's key channels for enabling individuals to face life with all its problems, successfully. Social workers use group work in all fields of social work practice such as workplace, hospitals, schools, correctional settings, etc. Group workers work with children, women, disabled, substance abusers, elderly, adolescents and any other individuals wanting help to help themselves. Social group work tries to find remedies for social illness and strives towards social growth and integration. Generally, microscopic groups are thought of as constructive mechanisms of social transformation and progress.

"Social group work had its origins in progressive, informal, and adult education, in recreation, in camping, in settlement houses and in youth serving organizations. Much of the support, research, programming and education in group work have taken place outside the boundaries of social work and much continues to do so, particularly in the field of education. Partly for these reasons, group work and educational objectives have always been compatible. Whether these objectives are defined, as they used to be, as "citizenship training" or "character building", or as they now often are as "creative problem solving" or "family life education", there is a fundamental fit between group work and learning objectives. Perhaps this is because group work, more than other social work methods, views group members as learners, whose behavioural repertories need to be enhanced and enlarged. Individual group members are viewed as creating and, in a sense, owning their group" Ephross, J. (1985).

According to Douglas the following are the assumptions on which the practice of social group work rests:

- Group experience is universal and an essential part of human existence

- Group can be used to effect changes in the attitudes and behaviour of individuals

- Group provides experiences which can be monitored or selected in some way for beneficial ends.

- Life outside the group is in no way neglected, it tends to be put out of focus.

- Group offers experience shared with others so that all can come to have something common with the sense of belonging and of growing together

- Groups produce change which is more permanent than can be achieved by other methods and the change is obtained more quickly also

- Groups assist in the removal or diminution of difficulties created by previous exposure to the process of learning

- Groups as instruments of helping others may be economical in the use of scarce resources, e.g. skilled workers, time etc.

- Group can examine its own behaviour and in so doing learn about the general patterns of group behaviour.

Thus, a careful analysis of these assumptions reveals that working with groups enables change amongst its members at an individual and collective level. The main feature of functioning with groups in societal milieu is that of reciprocal benefits. It is assumed that individuals progress and transform as they associate with others. Group work emphasizes that its members are not restricted to only

take away but also put in their contributions to the group, directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly.

Relevance of Life Skills Education in Social Group Work

Having discussed about Life Skills Education and social group work, let us try and understand the relevance of Life Skills Education in social group work. It is clear that both group work and life skills have the common goal of enhanced social functioning of its members. From its beginnings, group work practice and theory has been rooted in "social reform, social responsibility, democratic ideals, and social action as well as social relatedness and human attachment" (Lee, 1991: 3). The work done in groups was seen as purposeful activity that involved a process that considered both the individual in the group as well as the group as a whole as well as the larger community. A description of American Association of Group Workers' (AAGW) nature and functions written in 1947 clarifies group work's philosophy:

Group work is method of group leadership used in organizing and conducting various types of group activities. While group work developed first in connection with recreation and voluntary informal education … its use is not confined to those fields. It is increasingly being used in various types of institutions, in hospitals and clinics, in the extra-curricular activities of schools in similar situations. The guiding purpose behind such leadership rests upon the common assumptions of a democratic society, namely, the opportunity for each individual to fulfill his capacities in freedom, to respect and appreciate others and to assume social responsibility in maintaining and constantly improving our democratic society. (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0CYZ/is_4_28/ai_83530630/pg_11?tag=artBody;co11)

Life Skills Education is thus an important aspect of group work. "To apply group work premises to Life Skills Education is to try to incorporate role flexibility, responsiveness to stage of group development, and an ability to be comfortable with the shared human condition between worker and members. One needs to treat group members with respect for their group, not as an artificial stance but as a genuine component of the group's life. As for the participants, the group members need to be viewed as motivated and competent people who are choosing to take part in learning experiences. They learn from each other through informal group interaction, as well as from a process of motivated inquiry. The primary task of the group leader is to motivate, to facilitate, to promote and to orchestrate teaching and learning resources. The subject of learning – the course topic is important for two reasons, both for its own values and as a vehicle around which interpersonal learning, role elaboration and behavioural modeling can take place". http://etd.rau.ac.za/theses/ available/etd-04222004-100006/restricted/ chapter1MAThesis.pdf

Radin (1975: 605-613) states that school social workers must be concerned about all children in a school and not only with those with apparent problems and that all children should be prepared for their future roles in society. To enable the social worker to reach more than just the individual pupil, working in groups enables the worker to attend to not only the individual with the group, but the group collectively.

The advantage of attending to pupils in a group context is that there are times for individual reflection and discovery but these are usually the outcomes of some group interaction. Personal learning is shared with at least one another person. Pupils have experience of being in a group in some form or other. Thus, to use group work is to use

something to which most pupils can relate. (Rooth, 1995; Kruger, 1998).

Group work provides a context in which members help each other and learn from and with each other. Very importantly, group work teaches members to function in a democratic life style. Group work is also a method of participatory teaching (Rooth, 1999), which is based on democratic practices. It promotes the empowerment of the member in the group. The methods of group work are empirical and the group worker plays a facilitator's role.

Working in groups is in itself an important life skill (Nelson-Jones 1991: 89). According to Konapka, a healthy group life has the following ingredients:

1)   Provision for identification with equals

2)   Provision for warmth and belonging to more than one person. Fear of the threatened loss of the one and only beloved person is always present and becomes overwhelming if a wider relationship is not established in the course of life.

3)   Freedom to be and to express one's self and to be different in the presence of others.

4)   Freedom to choose the friends one prefers combined with a responsibility to accept others if they need to be accepted, even though no close friendly relationship can be established.

5)   Opportunity to try out one's own individuality while at the same time permitting the enjoyment of the uniqueness of others

6)   Opportunity to exercise independence and be allowed to be dependent when this is necessary and indicated, as in childhood or in distressing situations in adulthood.

7) Opportunity to give to others as well as receive from them

8) Opportunity to feel that as an individual or as a group, one has the strength to influence one's own fate (Konapka; 1972: 31)

Much of the education is based on the individual, competitive learning and teaching styles. This means that members get the opportunity to learn how to co-operate, compromise and work in a group and community context (Rooth 1999; Kruger 1998). Group work has many advantages besides being the method for empirical learning. Increasingly teachers use group work and find that it is an excellent way of teaching and learning (Nelson-Jones, 1991).

Social group work facilitates members in appreciating and treasuring their colleagues and peers. They understand that the transformation in their personality is also largely due to the contributions of the other members. This leads to increase in self-confidence, self-belief and eventually enhancement of social skills and the role of group work cannot be undermined in this process. Simultaneously, group work causes increased coverage of themes, thereby resulting in increased member involvement and interaction. Responsibility and sense of empowerment can result from involvement in group work. Pupils need to be empowered and group work is one way that aids empowerment (Rogers, 1983; Rooth 1999; Kruger 1998).

The aim of Life Skills Education in group work is to get the members work in groups rather than as individuals or as a large gathering. Within the framework of the group, members may assume diverse functions and stimulate immense amount of learning. The collective endeavor of every group member is vital. Another objective is to present life skills in the group context as component of outcome-

based education. Social group work with classroom groups is a preventative field of social work and since prevention is an ultimate aim of social work in any setting, it is believed that research in a preventative area would serve as a worthwhile contribution to school social work (Konapka, 1972: 113).

Conclusion

Thus we understand the relevance of Life Skills Education in social group work. Group experiences are indispensable requirements of individuals. The mutual and vigorous communications involving people and environment are intrinsic in social group work. Group work aids human beings in eliminating drawbacks and strengthening self to face life effectively.

Finally, practicing life skills leads to qualities such as self-esteem, sociability and tolerance, to action competencies – to take action and generate change, and to capabilities – to have the freedom to decide what to do and who to be. Life skills are thus distinctly different from physical or perceptual motor skills, such as practical or health skills, as well as from livelihood skills, such as crafts, money management and entrepreneurial skills. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_Skills_Based_Education)

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12

Programme Planning in Social Group Work

R. Nalini

Introduction

Careful planning is necessary for any successful group and it is a very important, ongoing group process. A well planned programme gives direction to the group and enables each member to know and prepare his/her responsibility. The group worker should possess abilities and skills to guide the members through an effective programme planning process. The programme planning process includes (i) setting goals (ii) brainstorming with members (iii) planning the programme in line with the goals (iv) obtaining the approval of the group (v) assigning individual and sub group responsibilities (vi) implementation of the programme (vi) periodic evaluation and feedback (vii) Follow-up

Concept of Programme Planning

Groups achieve their objectives through programmes that are split into achievable targets, tasks and activities. Therefore, deciding on appropriate programmes becomes very important for the progress and development of group and its members.

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"Programme as a concept and working tool is not prominent in the group work literature. This may be because it tends to be equated with a structured, goal-oriented approach. In reality, every group has a programme if we define it as *what the group does as a means of trying to achieve its aims.* With this definition, a decision to run a group on an existential creative spontaneity basis is as much a programme decision as is an elaborate timetable of visits, talks and structured activities. There is distinction to be made between *potential* or *planned* programme and *actual* programme. The former is what is planned in advance, the latter is what the group actually does, and the two do not always coincide.

Some basic considerations affect decisions about programme. The first two are philosophical as well as technical:

a) *Structure and Spontaneity*: Every group has to reach some balance between prearranged structure and spontaneous development. Some groups are so preplanned and rigid that there is no scope for response to the needs of individual members and their unique group. Others are so vague and unstructured that they drift along aimlessly, without anyone really knowing what they are there for, or what they are supposed to be doing. Groups need both the security of some known structure and the flexibility necessary for learning and change.

b) *Person and Task:* Every group is concerned with its members as people, and with the tasks for which it is met. A group with person-centered aims, as in group psychotherapy, is likely to devise a person-centered programme. A group which is highly task-oriented, whether the task is located at the individual, group or community level is likely to devise a programme

emphasising procedures, decisions and the monitoring of task achievement. Most social work groups require a sensitive balance between focus on persons and focus on task. This is one reason why programming is a highly skilled aspect of group work.

c) *Individual Factors*: Programme depends on what the members are capable of, and this varies according to age, verbal ability, motivation and self-control. In groups with a wide ability range, programme needs to include activities adaptable to individual differences.

d) *Group Factors*: Programme takes into account fixed factors such as group composition and size, and variable factors associated with the stage of development the group has reached, and its current state. This includes group morale, cohesion, conflict and the level of commitment to task.

e) *The Individual and the Group*: Programme should be consistent with what has been agreed with individuals and the group in the initial contract, although as the group develops, needs and interests change, and opportunities for renegotiating programme should be available. Programme involves a blending of activities which include the whole group with those which individuals undertake on their own, or in pairs, or sub groups. As a guideline, individual and pairs activities may be more needed in the early stages when group experience is rather daunting for some members.

f) *Resources*: many activities need resources, both cash and in kind. This may be a real limitation on programme and it is unethical to raise members' expectations about exciting activities unless necessary resources will be available.

Given these basic considerations, the groupworker then faces a number of questions. The choice within this range is dependent not only on the task, resources and member capabilities, but also on the skills and capability of the groupworker. Group members are quick to sense whether the worker feels comfortable with the methods she is using, and if she reveals excessive anxiety and uncertainty it will be transmitted rapidly to others. It may make them reluctant to engage in the activity, and more vulnerable to failure. Groupworkers wishing to extend their repertoire of activities and skills by trying out a new approach for the first time, can usually do so with more confidence if they have rehearsed it beforehand in the relatively 'safe' setting of the team or a training session, perhaps using video play-back" (Brown, A; 1994: 97-98).

For people to be served effectively in a group, sound preparation for the initiation and subsequent development of that group is essential. Thorough and thoughtful planning contributes mightily to the success of social group work. Planning comprises the thinking, preparation, decision-making, and actions of the group with facilitation by the social worker. Max Siporin notes, the planning process is deliberate and rational, designed to assure the achievement of specific objectives. The programme decisions are based on knowledge of social contexts, group processes, agency policies and procedures, and assessments of clients in their networks of interacting social systems.

Principles of Programme Planning

Providing a programme of activities is one of the main tasks of a group. Planning the group's activities in advance helps a group run smoothly because:

- Members understand and accept their responsibilities

- Optimum utilization of resources

- Better coordination between group members, agency and the worker in accomplishment of objectives

Programmes in group work have to be effective since the groups' effectiveness is largely dependent on its programmes. Programme planning is an instrument in the hands of the group and the worker and its efficient use results in feasible, well thought out programmes. Programme planning in social group work has to follow certain principles, termed by Trecker (1955) as the 'criteria of effectiveness':

- Programme should grow out of the needs and interests of the individuals who compose the group

- Programme should take into account such factors as age of group members, cultural background, and economic differences

- Programme should provide individuals with experiences and opportunities which they voluntarily choose to pursue because of their inherent values

- Programme should be flexible and varied to satisfy a variety of needs and interests and to afford a maximum number of opportunities for participation

- Programme should evolve from the simple to the more complex with movement coming as a result of group growth in ability and readiness. Movement from initially "personal" to "social" or "community" concerns should be an ultimate objective if our programmes are to have a greater social significance.

A Set of Guidelines to Programme Planning

Stage 1

- What is the objective of the programme?

- What is the group members' wants/welfare

- What are the resources accessible?

- What is the relevance of the programme to the group's objective?

Stage 2

- Splitting the programme into smaller realizable goals and tasks

- Actual implementation commences

Stage 3

- Periodic evaluation of the programme and progressing to the next phase of the programme based on the evaluation and inputs of members themselves

Stage 4

- Reflection – giving members a chance to look back on their experiences of the programme and see how they have progressed, in the process.

Factors Influencing Programme Planning

All initiatives and efforts of the group in pursuit of fulfilling its goal is considered to be a programme in the social group work context. Though one tends to equate programme with activity, let us be clear that programme is a concept that comprises of not only activities but also emotional aspects such as group bonding, communications, experiences etc. One important aspect is that all these should result out of conscious planning by the group under the guidance of the worker. Programme is thus a process rather than the

periodic culmination of a process. In the light of the above, let us discuss the factors influencing programme planning:

The primary responsibility for programmes in groups lies with its group members – the group worker is only a facilitator in the entire process. The programmes have to be person-centered, catering to the requirements of its members. The group members, therefore, have to engage themselves to their best possible extent in programme planning, fully understanding that its successful implementation calls for their cooperation and contribution.

If a programme has to be person-centered, it has to respond to the wants and welfare of the group members. The group worker has to make the group understand that (i) there is a vast distinction between the wants of the group members and their welfare (ii) This can be gathered when group members put across their views during programme planning sessions. However, when group starts spelling out ideas for the programme, the worker needs to carefully evaluate them on the basis of collective interests, fine foundation, feasibility in terms of resources and agency's objectives, feasibility of personal partaking of members and also of group's cooperation.

It is of equal importance that the worker consistently taps the wants and welfare of the group from its members. Gathering this vital information is not a one time affair to be done in the initial stages of the programme, but has to flow at periodic intervals to ensure that the programme is on the right path. The worker has to understand and also convey to the group members that programme planning is an ongoing process – that as the programme evolves in sequence, one could comprehend the group's progress as well.

Any discussion of programme in social group work must take into account such items as content and area, media

of expression, and methods of conducting it. Programme area or content refers to a segment of life experience that has general meaning for the individuals at their specific point of development. The programme process is not segmental; in actual work all these are interrelated and almost indistinguishable (Trecker; 1955).

In order to grow and execute its programmes, the group has to have systems for:

- Decision-making and its support from group members

- Delegation of responsibilities and its accountability

- Develop whole-hearted involvement of all the group members, in all the phases of a programme such as planning, execution, evaluation etc.

- Direct day-to-day affairs of the agency and its members

The group worker enables the group to understand their role in programme planning and implementation – that programmes are successful largely due to the members' willingness to share responsibilities. During the planning stages, the group members should clearly assign and accept duties and responsibilities – individually, in pairs or through forming smaller committees within the group. The group worker assists the members in functioning in unity towards executing the programme.

Healthy, purposeful and friendly communication among group members is the essence of programme planning and development. The group worker's role here is imperative. He steers the group members to meaningful communication which in turn leads to the group working towards aims that reciprocate with the agency's functioning. Thus communication is a fundamental mode on the road to the group's goals.

Thus, the programme planning process is influenced by various factors such as: (i) consistent unearthing of the

wants and welfare of members (ii) identification of the point wherein the programme shall commence (iii) studying and scrutinizing work responsibilities involved in programme execution (iv) delegating duties and responsibilities to various members (v) synchronization of individual efforts and striving for harmony among the group members and programme evaluation

A Sample Programme

The following is a very brief outline of a programme to help a group learn listening skills.

- The 'Indicators' are how the leader identified the need of the group and what skill to develop

- The 'Activities' are how the group learned and practiced the skills

- The 'Skills Practiced' breaks the skill down into small achievable steps and each activity is matched to the step it helps the group to take

- 'The Learning' is the aim of the programme/activity

Identify The Need	Activities	Skills Practiced	The Learning
A group has trouble listening to each other Indicators • Members have trouble taking turns to make a point • disagreements caused by not taking time to understand others • difficult to facilitate group discussions	Group games	asking and waiting for a reply listening for another person's voice	Listening is important for having fun and achieving
	Listening games & group discussion	Awareness of listening skills	What skills make me a better listener
	Problem solving game in which the group has to listen to each other	Practice of the skills learnt so far Practicing the skills Recognition for being good at the skills	The group works better when we listen to each other

The above outline shows how very different activities can help the group learn listening skills. Lots of different skills can be developed in this way from practical skills like swimming to complex skills like team work.

http://www.cdysb.ie/publications/PDF/Programme%20 Planning.pdf

Recording in Social Group Work

Writing and maintaining group work records is an essential element of professional social work. A recording well done saves the group worker the trouble of having to emphasize to the agency about the group's progress in various aspects. But how seriously does the social work fraternity take up recording or written communication? Let us read what experts have to say on this:

"We believe that it is important that social work educators, students and professionals focus on developing their written communication skills for a range of reasons. These include:

- Writing is a core mode of communication in many fields of social work practice. The capacity to communicate effectively in writing can enhance practice in many ways, from promoting inter disciplinary team communication to advancing the capacity to attract funds and influence policy

- Writing skills, like all professional skills, can be learnt. Just as social work professionals can develop effective spoken communication skills, so too their professional writing skills can improve through sustained attention and effort

- Written communication can represent complex matters better than speech can. So it is a vital tool for social workers, who are often involved in complex

situations with individuals, families and communities and need to be able to convey the intricacies to others who may have limited first-hand experience of the specific situations. In addition, some professional writing tasks, such as completing tender documents, can require the integration of detailed and complex information in a succinct and cohesive format.

• Social workers' approach to writing should reflect the distinctive character of their professional purpose. This is shaped by the institutional context and audience, and must always be driven, at least in part, by professional knowledge and an ethical value base" (Healy & Mulholland; 2007: 2-3).

Principles of Recording in Social Group Work

Recording in social group work aims to make better the quality of service to the members. The agency could assess the quality of its service, thereby understanding its efficiency. Group records are imperative in study, research and experimentation.

Principle of Flexibility: the record must be adapted to the agency's purpose because group work practice and agency purpose are inseparably interwoven

Principle of Selection: worker does not include everything in his record but selects significant material in the light of individual and group development

The Principle of Readability: form and style are important and that clarity of expression is essential for all written material

The Principle of Confidentiality: the record is a professional document and that as such its contents are guarded by as sense of professional ethics.

The Principle of Worker Acceptance: the worker must accept his responsibility to write records because of his conviction that records have value in rendering high quality professional service. (Trecker; 1955: 208)

Types of Recording in Social Group Work

Group work recording is more difficult than recording one-to-one interviews because of the complex nature of a small group. In groups with a task oriented focus, recording will be concerned with tangible tasks, plans, actions and decisions. In a person-oriented group, where feelings, relationships, and non-verbal communication receive high priority, recording is dealing with intangibles, perhaps the most difficult of all to write about. Most group records attempt to communicate both content and process. Group work recording has several different purposes as follows:

* Agency requirements

* Training and skill development

* Planning, evaluation and research

* For direct use in work with members (Brown, A; 1994: 99-100).

Thus recording in group work is based on (i) Contents and (ii) Process.

Content Recording:

Numerical information on registration, enrolment and attendance of individuals and groups

Programme reports, depending on the types of activities the group is involved in.

Process Recording:

Another kind of record kept by group workers is the chronological narrative write up of the group-work process

as it develops. In this kind of record each meeting of the group is described in full detail. It is a process record in the sense that primary attention is given to the participation and interaction of the members, with a view of determining the role of each individual in the affairs of the group. The major value of the narrative process record from the standpoint of the worker is that such records help the worker to do a more effective job with his groups. Every other purpose is in a sense a sub purpose of this major one: to improve the quality of experience provided for the group. The record is thus a tool in the process of understanding the group and learning how to help it. The process records help the worker to (i) become more aware of the members of the group (ii) see emerging and changing interests of the individuals (iii) see evolving needs and how these needs are being met (iv) see the development of skills and social attitudes (v) becomes sensitive to special problems which may interfere with the individual's full use of the group (vi) it shows the variety of patterns of interpersonal relationship which take place within the group (vii) The development of the worker's relationship and role can be ascertained from careful recording of what he does while helping the group. (Trecker; 1955).

Contents in a Group Work Record

A group record is expected to hold the following information. This is especially important in the case of a worker leaving the group and when a new group worker takes over. By referring to the group records, (assuming it is done professionally), the new worker can be relatively at ease since group records consist of information that enables him to take hold of the appropriate 'strings'.

Given below is a gist of the contents a group work record shall consist of:

• Individual behaviour of the group members

- Nature and degree of members' involvement in the group's affairs

- Source and progress of suggestions, initiatives and innovations

- The worker's role with minute details of what he exactly does in executing his responsibilities

- The worker's thoughts and feelings about the group situation

- The development, transformation and evolution observed in members and in the group as a whole

- Affiliation among the group and the agency community relationships inclusive

Tips on Recording

Thus, recording skills calls for the worker's keen observation, understanding of dynamics of relationships within individual members and among the group as a whole and understanding the importance of how group cohesiveness is built. The worker also consciously puts in writing his contribution to the group's functioning.

Recording is not difficult, but thinking and analysis that precede the actual writing is difficult. Here are some tips for recording in social group work:

- Organize a concise, thematic sketch prior to putting things in writing as it facilitates in arranging the information/facts and in the choice of the main issues

- Clear-cut language, concise sentences, frequent paragraphing along with appropriate titles all through the document assists in subsequent assessment

- All the records should be accompanied with the dates, place and time to ensure

- The dating of all entries is important because it shows continuity

- Regular summations of individual and group progress are important means for appraisal of the group's development

Conclusion

Thus, programme planning is a significant part of social group work and the group worker is expected to navigate the group with its individual members in this process.

All groups have natural processes or group dynamics and the skill of the group worker lies in developing a programme of activities which phase in with the stages and condition of the group, to provide the best possible opportunities for task achievement. Group workers need to be flexible and pragmatic in their use of programme, drawing on different sources and ideas (Brown, A; 1994).

A proper record of all his initiatives will be a knowledge bank from which academicians and practitioners alike can draw from and build upon.

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Websites

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