

Book Notes for

How to Observe Your Group (4th ed.)

Dimock & Kass, 2007

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Notes compiled by Jim Force, Ph.D.

The purpose of these notes is to provide
an overview of the contents of this important book.

Chapter 1: Some Ways of Looking at Group Development

THE ROLE OF THEORY IN GROUP OBSERVATION

"Whether or not you can observe a thing depends on the theory you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed." - Albert Einstein (p. 1)

The "discipline of noticing"

development of observational skills

- focusing on group functioning thus becoming a good "participant observer (p. 1)
- focusing on self and becoming a *witness to one's* own actions (pp. 1-2)

discriminating observations: observations representing the interests and biases of the observer. (p. 2)

differentiating observations: "specific differences identified by group research and theory of group dynamics and development." (p. 2)

"there is nothing more practical than a good theory" Kurt Lewin (p. 2)

OBSERVING PERSONAL NEEDS

REAPS model of personal needs (p. 4)

Recognition

Experience

Approval

Power

Security

Control & Power: attempts to do what you want and to control behavior of others.
can be manifested as dominating, reactionary or dogmatic behavior

Self-advancement: attempts to gain recognition, status, promotion, approval.

Group Dimensions (p. 4)

Content: discussions or activities of the group

Process: how group is working and relating to one another

VIEWPOINT I - DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS

2 major contribution of group development (p. 5)

- identifies areas worth observing
- explains relationship interactions within group

5 Developmental Dimensions (p. 8)

closely related to each other

account for most of the dynamics of any group

Group Climate (p. 5)

Physical Climate - environmental surroundings

Emotional Climate - well-being and growth of group

determines security and acceptance of members (p. 6)

trust decreases anxiety, encourages risk-taking & resource use (p. 6)

Group Involvement (p. 6)

Extent members are occupied or absorbed with the group.

Key questions for assessing involvement:

- Why are members here?
- What attracts them to the group?
- What level of commitment do they have to the group?
- What personal needs are they meeting by belonging to the group?

Group Interaction (p. 7)

Key dimension for group development

more members interact with each other the more likely it will meet goals

Interaction encouraged by

- arranging set-up so everyone can see and hear each other
- selecting activities that facilitate working together

Members who feel secure and accepted interact more and express themselves more - feeling, concerns and problems

Group Cohesion (pp. 7-8)

Relates to strengths of relationships within the group.

Assessed by determining how well members know and understand each other.

Encourages deviant members to accept group standards.

Holds group together and enables it to achieve goals.

Group Productivity (p. 8)

Provides motivation and focus for group interaction.

Movement toward goals influences satisfaction and pride in the group.

Appropriateness of leadership style is a major influence on group morale and productivity.

VIEWPOINT II - MEMBER ROLES

"Leadership may be defined in functional terms as acts that help the group to accomplish its goals or maintain itself as a group." (p. 9)

"The roles of its members implies that a group needs both task- and group building-oriented participation of members if it is to grow and become fully productive." (p. 9)

"Giving major attention to task roles produces lower output (productivity) than giving attention to both task and group roles." (p. 9)

Task Roles (p. 10)

1. defines problems
2. seeks information
3. gives information
4. seeks opinions
5. gives opinions
6. tests feasibility

Group-Building and Maintenance Roles

7. coordinating
8. mediating-harmonizing
9. orienting-facilitating
10. supporting-encouraging
11. following

Individual Roles (non-functional)

12. blocking
13. out of field
14. digressing

Groups need appropriate role functioning at the right time. (p. 10)

Role Flexibility: ability to take on a wide variety of roles as they are needed. (p. 10)

A group has to have a balance of task and group functions to reach its potential. (p. 12)

VIEWPOINT III - INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

This framework assumes that groups, like individuals, have three basic developmental needs: (1) inclusion, (2) control, and (3) intimacy or openness. (p. 12)

Group development is handicapped if each dimension is not resolved as it arises. (p. 12)
"Each dimension moves forward one at a time, and each requires the previous one to be resolved before it can develop adequately." (p. 13)

The usual order of development is from dimension to dimension as problems arise.

Inclusion Stage

"During the first few meetings of a new group the members try to get to know each other to see whom they will like and who will accept them. (p. 15)

Members need to work out shared expectations. (p. 16)

Ignoring the give/get inclusion concerns and moving directly onto specific tasks doesn't work out. (p. 16)

Control Stage

Groups leave inclusion stage with a clear picture of the acceptance level of each member. (p. 16)

In the control stage members work out "who gets to decide what for whom." (p. 16)

Aggression and conflict arise as members jockey for positions in the control hierarchy. (p. 17)

Lot of bickering over minor points as members attempt to consolidate their positions. (p. 17)

Members trying to take over the group may be seeking safety within the group. (p. 17)

"Any 'pecking order,' even if you come in last, is better than none, as ambiguity about position and continuous conflict in pushing for a position is totally unsettling." (p. 17)

"Victim:" person who imagines that they deserve special consideration (p. 17)

I'm such and such, so I can't . . .

If group goes along with this, then the person is able to opt out of activities or veto agreements without losing position or power in the group. (p. 17)

Once control issues are resolved at an adequate level the group is able

- to share leadership functions among all members
- no member is indispensable
- all share in accepting responsibility (p. 18)

Openness stage

Major concern "is working out how open or authentic members are prepared to be with one another considering the purposes of the group." (p. 18)

As this stage is successfully resolved

- there is an acceptance of individual differences
- less concern about deviants conforming to group standards
- creative members play more important role
- leadership shifts among members as situations change (p. 18)

Data available for problem-solving increases with as personal feelings and opinions are communicated. (p. 19)

"Resolving conflict is no longer the concern it was during the control stage." (p. 19)

Summary of Viewpoint III (p. 20)

	Inclusion	Control	Openness
Concern in play	Who's in/out?	Who gets to decide what for whom?	How do members feel about each other?
Typical Activities	Minor issue discussions. Creating a good impression.	Jockeying for position. Testing leader.	Interpersonal feedback. Focus on goal achievement.
Individual Members Concerns	What's expected of me? How much do I want to be a member?	How much control do I have over myself and others?	How safe is it to be myself in this group?
Group Growth Concerns	What is the commitment of each member?	Settling the "pecking order" and decision-making procedures.	Building authentic behaviour and its acceptance.
Dominant Member Feelings	Insecurity. Excitement. Enthusiasm.	Dissatisfaction. Disillusionment. Competition.	Trust. Acceptance. Goal-orientation.
Productivity	Generally low but high spots on minor procedural issues.	Medium depending on issues used to "jockey for position.	High if inclusion, control and openness resolved; low if group aborts.

Termination

"As the group moves to closure, there is an increase of anxiety and unsureness."
(p. 19)

Summary

"The most frequent cause of arrested development is an unresolved control issue. Often it takes the form of one or two rebellious members with low commitment who posture as egalitarian humanists and block all decision making to 'protect individual rights.'" (p. 21)

Trust and openness can't be established by proclamation. (p. 21)

VIEWPOINT IV - WORK AND EMOTION

The *Emotional Content* is assessed on three continua: (p. 22)

1. *Flight* - Avoidance or denial of the problem, issue or task.
Fight - Hostility and assertion, a direct confrontation of the problem.
2. *Pairing* - Expression of intimacy, acceptance, and supportiveness.
Counter-pairing - Rejecting warmth and supportiveness of others.
3. *Dependency* - Reliance on a person (leader, teacher, supervisor) or thing external to membership (policies, experts, regulations).
Counter-dependency - Rejection or denial of authority or outside influences.

Above categories can be used to describe a group or an individual. (p. 22)

"The emotional quality often determines the level of work and vice versa." (p. 22)

Phases of Group Growth

Work Phase: group is reflective, orderly, and members are listening to each other (p. 23)

Emotional Phase: in response to individual needs or stress the group may be disorderly and hostile (p. 23)

Early Phase: (p. 23)

- characterized by concerns about authority
- oriented toward the distribution of power within the group
- usual reaction is one of dependence and flight

Middle Phase: (pp. 23-24)

- attempt to size up authority figure
- concern about what rewards and punishments may arise from various behaviours
- how much power will the leader have
- how much control members will have

More *fight* behaviour as members jockey for position.

As leadership hierarchy is established pairing and sub-grouping increases, which makes the group more relaxed and enjoyable.

Mature Phase: (pp. 24-25)

- characterized by pairing and good feelings that lead to increased attractiveness and cohesion of the group
- Group standards evolve
- pressure on deviants to conform to group standards
- challenge is for group to work through compromise and harmony veneer and free up openness and authenticity
- able to build around individual member limitations

"Maturity is measured by how effectively the group manages tensions, conflicts, and the deviant or creative behaviour of its members" (p. 25)

Mature phase is one of

- integration
- group flexibility
- open expression of individual feelings
- the positive use of differing opinions and conflict
- task accomplishment
- group interdependence (p. 25)

Main contribution of this theory is "its clarity about the importance of working through the roles and relations with the authority figure in the group." (p. 25)

VIEWPOINT V - TORI AND TRUST FORMATION

Gibb's TORI theory is based on trust. (p. 25)

TORI is based on 4 dimensions: **T**rust, **O**penness, **R**ealization, & **I**nterdependence. (p. 25)

Fear: a symptom of unresolved trust. (p. 25)
most crippling feature in personal and group development

TORI concerns related to group growth (p. 26)

- *Acceptance* is concerned with the achievement of membership in the group based on trust.
- *Data flow* is concerned with opening valid, spontaneous communication in the group and translating these data into decision making and choices.
- *Goal formation* has to do with determining member wants and integrating them into problem solving and group action planning, with a goal of productive, creative work.

- *Control* is concerned with leadership, power, and organizational structures that can be developed into freedom-giving, flexible forms.

"According to TORI theory, the most revealing aspect of a group's development is a description of the ways in which the early fears in the group are resolved by an increase in trust." (p. 26)

"Trusting is an open process, and any high-trust group can't help but be open to highly unpredictable and emergent outcomes." (p. 26)

Designated leader should be working on the same concerns as part of the group. (p. 26)

Basic leadership question:

What would I be doing if I trusted this group more? (p. 28)

VIEWPOINT VI - THE FORMING-STORMING MODEL OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Stages of Group Growth (pp. 28-29)

Forming - getting started as a group and looking to the designated leader for guidance.

Storming - competition and conflict at the interpersonal level and over goals and procedures.

Norming - acceptance of other members, cooperation, and building cohesion.

Performing - high morale based on pride of task accomplishment and richness of interpersonal relations.

Adjourning - movement toward closure: disengagement from relationships and termination of tasks.

VIEWPOINT VII - LACOURSIERE'S LIFE CYCLE IN GROUPS

5-Stage Progressive Cycle of Group Development

"Lacoursiere sees few people or groups, as 'free of experiences governed by these developmental stages and the associated changes in morale.'" (p. 30)

Orientation

central focus is getting oriented to the task at hand. (p. 30)

"negative orientation:" when members are forced or pressured to participate

- heavy reliance on the leader
- setting of unrealistic goals by group members
- task is too vague and unrealistic (p. 30)

positive orientation

- upbeat atmosphere
- high morale
- expressed feelings of optimism, enthusiasm and expectations that are positive although unrealistic (p. 31)

Observational Tip: watch for mandatory participation and unrealistic expectations and statements. (p. 31)

Dissatisfaction

A difficult and frustrating stage imbued with ambiguity and anxiety. (p. 31)

This stage is an encounter with reality - focus on discrepancies between expectations and experience. (p. 31)

Observational Tip: watch for unwillingness to adapt to the situation. (p. 31)

While getting stuck is possible in any stage, it is more likely to occur during the dissatisfaction stage. (p. 32)

Resolution

This stage closes the gap between expectations and reality. (p. 32)

Observational Tip: watch for recognition and ownership of the issue and limitations of the situation. (p. 33)

Production

Commitment to constructive work begins. (p. 33)

Observational Tip: watch for validation of member skills, involvement and commitment to task, and the valuing and appearance of maintenance roles. (p. 33)

Termination

Represents a period of assessment and realistic self-appraisal. (p. 34)

Observational Tip: watch for the level of realistic self-appraisal. (p. 34)

ENDINGS

Endings have to do with closure and a shift in relationships (p. 35)

They are periods of

- reflections
- sharing of learnings and insights
- doubts, reservations, and intentions
- fluctuating morale depending on the task completion (p. 35)

"Closure' is a difficult dynamic of life and that most of us have 'unfinished business' with endings, transitions, and letting go." (p. 39)

Committees often complete their task of assessing their product but not their process. (p. 39)

Failure to observe and build in closure is to miss the opportunity to maximize quality, involvement, and task effectiveness. (p. 39)

OBSERVING GROUP CONFLICT

"Conflict in a group is a neutral dynamic, and the critical issue is how it is managed." (p. 40)

Open and accepting groups tend to have more productive, growth-producing activities than restrictive, totalitarian ones. (p. 40)

"conflict is the most difficult of all phases in a group's development, it is also the most critical, since it provides opportunities for growth, learning and relearning." (p. 40)

Differing opinions and priorities are growth producing; therefore, sanction them and build their usefulness into the growth of the team. (p. 41)

Observing Conflict:

- what is it about?
- analyze its source.
- describe how it is managed.
- what seems to help and hinder its usefulness. (p. 41)

MALE-FEMALE ROLES IN GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Androgynous: the person who blends masculine and feminine roles. (p. 41)

Stereotyped male roles: tough, dominant, competitive and assertive

Stereotyped female roles: sensitive, understanding, affectionate, warm and sympathetic

SCAPEGOATING THE ASSISTANT DESIGNATED LEADER

Anger, disappointment, and hostility can be directed at the person with whom the leader pairs or visibly supports when this person is safer to attack than the leader. (p. 43)

ADJUSTING THEORY USE FOR OBSERVATIONS

Control and Structure are important aspects of group dynamics. (p. 44)

Structure: the clarity and specificity of participant's roles and functions in the group's reason for existence. (p. 44)

High Control - High Structure Groups (p. 44)

- early phase starts smoothly
- leader's power and authority are clear
- task is definite
- participants know or are told what to do
- interpersonal interests are worked on informally outside the group

Low Control - Low Structure Groups (p. 44)

- early stage opens with "cocktail" talk
- anxiety about what to do and how to do it
- no one ready to share control functions, thus leadership attempts fail until members know how the "game is to be played" and until trust is developed

High Control - Low Structure Groups (p. 45)

- early phase leader is accepted
- lack of purpose may cause leader to lose authority
- as leader's competence emerges the group will settle down

Observational Tips (pp. 45-46)

Early phase developmental issues:

- who gets to decide what and for whom in this group?
- where, if at all, do I fit into this group?
- who in the group can I relate to and trust?
- what can I do in this group to gain influence, status, and recognition?

Tip #1: Keep basic participant needs in mind when watching the action.

Tip #2: What is it members are trying to do for themselves with their verbal statements or lack of them. What basic need or anxiety are they trying to reduce about control or structure.

Tip #3: Watch how member's attempts to meet their needs or reduce their anxiety succeed, if at all.

Tip #4: Check to see what effect a participant's behaviour has on other individuals or on the group as a whole.

The challenge in observing is to maintain focus on observing the process rather than being sucked into focusing on what is upsetting the group. (p. 47)

Chapter 2: How to Observe Group Behaviour

"You can observe a lot just watching." - Yogi Berra

"Group leadership is effective to the extent that it facilitates growth of the group and its task accomplishments." (p. 49)

Sharpening observation skills "is a sure way of making groups more effective." (p. 49)

"If you do not know what is really going on in the group, it is difficult to lead it." (p. 49)

Essential dimensions for the focus of observation (p. 50)

- procedures for task accomplishment and resulting productivity
- group-building and group-relationship activities, especially those related to power and control

3 Kinds of Observers

Participant-observer: everyone and anyone in the group who is using observation to help figure out what is happening in the group and make their interventions more useful. (p. 50)

Designated observer: assigned group process observer whose goal is to help the whole group understand more about what is happening in the group and motivate members to appropriate action. (p. 50)

Skill of getting group to own observations and to do something positive with them is more important than insightful data that is ignored. (p. 51)

The goal of the designated observer is to

- gain acceptance of the data
- stimulate further discussion and analysis of it by the group (p. 51)

Data should be descriptive and non-judgmental and a bit open-ended to encourage other perspectives from the group. (p. 51)

Evaluation observer: person collecting information for performance appraisal, program evaluation, and planning, or for supervising and coaching the designated leader. (p. 51)

SO YOU ARE A NEW MEMBER IN A GROUP

Use "focused watching" to quickly find out the group's "usual way of doing things" so you can fit in if you so choose. (p. 51)

Some informal, unwritten "rules" or ways of doing things seem unusual, so don't show a lot of surprise at them - people don't like the illogical ways of being laughed at. (p. 52)

"if you can avoid aggressive competition for power while you are working out your inclusion, you will have a greater chance to be more influential later on." (p. 53)

Culture Analysis Observation Guide (some sample questions) (p. 53)

- what behaviour/activities get rewarded/demerits?
- what are the major sources of anxiety and concern?
- what are the norms/practices/expectations?
- what support and encouragement are people given?
- what's talked about privately but not publicly
- how are unacceptable behaviours punished?
- how is conflict, aggressive competition, and major disagreement handled?

"All group behaviour has some purpose, some payoff along the line." (p. 54)

Improving Observation Skills

Keep observations simple and straightforward. (p. 54)

For participant-observers and designated observers it is important to ensure that the observations and recording don't interfere with their participation in the group. (p. 55)

It is important to separate objective descriptions from hunches and interpretations (p. 55)

For training purposes, the ideal is for the total group to decide the areas they want to have observed and either take turns observing or have a pair of observers do several sessions, then pass the task on to a new pair. (p. 56)

Videos are most useful when providing individuals with objective feedback about their behaviour or helping formal group observers check the accuracy of their recordings. (pp. 57-58)

Another observation concern is the balancing of observations areas such as content (what the group is working on and what it is saying) and process (how the group is working) (p. 59)

Balance observations about individuals and the group as a whole. (p. 59)

Note observations of what did *not* happen. (p. 59)

Training Group Observers

Observers work most effectively and accurately if they design their own observation guide or major areas to observe. (p. 60)

Group biases and value judgments are likely to appear during early practices. (p. 60)

Most people move descriptive observations too quickly to conclusions or evaluations so they can take action. (p. 60)

Descriptions are always safe and lead to further discussion, while conclusions may arouse resentment and close the group off from the observer. (p. 60)

OBSERVATION GUIDES - DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS

Group Observation Guide

In using the group observation guide the observer glances over the sheet periodically during a meeting and makes a note or two of something that has become clear. (p.61)

"Watching and participating in the group comes first, making notes second. (p. 61)

Questions arising from the guide that can be asked of the group:

- To what extent are the problems we worked on today important ones to you? Why? In what way?
- To what extent did you understand our goal, what we were trying to accomplish?
- What pressure, if any, did you feel to change your opinion and go along with the majority? (p. 61)

Under the "interaction" heading it is noted that who speaks to whom is worth noting. (p. 62)

Interaction Diagram

The interaction diagram shows the diversity of participation and the amount of each person. (p. 62)

Two 5-minute samples during an hour meeting usually provide a reasonably accurate picture of interaction. (p. 62)

Survey of Group Development

This tool is designed for intermittent use with a group. (p. 63)

13 Dimensions of Group Development (pp. 64-65)

1. *Unity*: degree of cohesion or "we-ness"
2. *Self-direction*: group's own motive power
3. *Group climate*: extent to which members feel free to be themselves
4. *Distribution of leadership*: extent to which leadership roles are distributed among members
5. *Distribution of responsibility*: extent to which responsibility is shared among members
6. *Problem solving*: group's ability to think straight, make use of everyone's ideas, and decide creatively about its problems
7. *Method of resolving disagreements with group*: How group works out disagreements

8. *Meets basic needs*: extent to which group gives a sense of security, achievement, approval, recognition, and belonging
9. *Variety of activities*: extent to which different approaches are tried that lead to considerable variety
10. *Depth of activities*: extent to which activities are gone into in such a way that members can use full potentials, skills, and creativity
11. *Leader-member rapport*: relations between the group and the designated leader
12. *Role of the leader*: extent to which the group is centred around the designated leader
13. *Stability*: consistency of group's membership and attendance

Roles of Group Members Guide

This popular guide encourages descriptions of individual behaviour and makes for specific feedback to each member. (p. 65)

Can also be used to focus on entire group's behaviour, showing areas overplayed or ones rarely taken. (p. 65)

5-minute time samples can be taken every 20-30 minutes for participant-observers. (p. 66)

All task and group building roles can be helping or hindering the group depending upon the situation and timing. (p. 67)

Behaviour Frequency Observation Guide

This guide is most useful where indicators of the growth of individual members are needed. (p. 67)

It is most useful when completed by more than one observer over a period of time in which several ratings have been made. (p. 67)

OTHER OBSERVATION AREAS

Always included in any list of observation areas are the two major motivators that are at play:

- Control and power
- Self-advancement
 - recognition
 - status
 - promotion
 - monetary gains (p. 68)

GROUP RECORDS

Group records form the basis for the analysis of the group's strengths and weaknesses and the designated leaders' attempts to optimize their coaching roles. (p. 68)

They are also used for systematic or planned group development. (p.68)

Anecdotal Records

An anecdotal record describes in objective terms an interesting or unusual event that involves an individual, a small group or the entire group. (p. 70)

Narrative/Descriptive Records

Narrative or descriptive records are kept in diary form with the recorders describing what happened and how they felt and reacted to these happenings. (p. 71)

The focus of the narrative records is group process. (p. 71)

The main problem with anecdotal and narrative records is the difficulty most people have writing non-judgmental descriptions. (p. 71)

The main question beginning workers ask is

What records should I keep?

The answer is

Those records that will help you to work with the group more effectively in order that it can achieve its objectives and the organization's goals. (p. 72)

#1 Rule: Do not collect more data than you can use, rather try to expand your resources and develop your skills whenever possible. (p. 73)

REPORTING OBSERVATIONS TO YOUR GROUP

The success of reporting observations has more to do with the way you present the data than with the quality of the data. (p. 73)

Groups that have continuing success with an observer function usually share it around the group with each member taking turns to report. (p. 74)

To keep the observation report from becoming a lecture

- assign two observers or
- expect everyone to be a participant-observer
- turn the report into a group discussion (p. 74)

It is helpful to make a few provocative observations of key areas of the group's process. Too much data is boring and counter-productive. (p. 74)

If you make interpretations, try posing them as hunches or questions. (p. 74)