UNIT 11 INTER-GROUP BEHAVIOUR

Structure

11 0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to know the :

● nature of groups and Inter-group behaviour,

● factors affecting Coordination, which is very much required for better Inter-group performance, and

● ways to manage Inter-group relations.

11. INTRODUCTION

An organisation is an aggregate of many smaller groups. The study of groups is vital for the understanding of behaviour because individuals seldom act without being influenced by others. Behaviour takes place within a group, even if that group consists of not more than two persons. Much of the research on social functioning in general has been done in small group settings. It has either been related to the basic characteristics of group behaviour or has focussed upon the applied aspects. Studies on work teams, management conference groups and academic committees have proved the omnipresence and importance of the groups and the Inter-group behaviour. **The process by which people interact face to face in small groups is called group dynamics.** Groups are vehicles or instruments for the fulfilment of the needs of the people and for the achievement of the goals of the organisations. But this is possible only if there is positive inter-group behaviour. In this Unit, you will learn about the nature of groups, meaning and scope of inter-group behaviour, coordination and managing inter-group relations.

11.2 NATURE OF GROUPS

People spend the maximum amount of time in doing things together in groups. Most people cluster into relatively small groups for economic support, having a family and mutually caring for the health of one another. Education and socialisation of children tend to occur usually in other larger groups in schools or other social institutions. Much of the work of the society is carried out by people who perform their activities in close interdependence within relatively enduring associations.

The functioning or malfunctioning of groups is recognised increasingly as one of society's major problems. In business, government and other organised sectors, there,is a great interest in improving the productivity of groups. Those concerned with social welfare are diligently seeking ways to reduce inter-group conflicts between labour and management. To understand and improve human behaviour it is necessary to know a great deal about the nature of groups. For example some of the questions worth considering are :

When and under what conditions do groups'form ? ˙ .

What conditions are necessary for their growth and effective functioning ?

What factors foster the decline and disintegration of groups ?

How do groups affect the behaviour, thinking, motivation and adjustment of individuals ?

What makes some groups have powerful influence over members while other groups exert little or none ?

What characteristics of individuals are important determinants of the prosperity of groups ? and,

What determines the nature of relations between groups ?

11.3 TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING INTER-GROUP BEHAVIOUR

Personalities, customs and traditions are developed in a group. There are certain characteristics of a particular group that differentiate it from other groups. It is the collective behaviour of people within a group that makes it have its special personality or its individuality as a group. Just as leaders have styles and patterns of behaviour as perceived by followers, groups also have modes or patterns of behaviour as perceived by others. The following views of the various schools of thought are important to the understanding of inter-group behaviour :

● People tend to perform tasks better in the presence of others.

● It is believed that conflict is a natural and inevitable outcome in a group (traditional view).

● It is believed that all conflicts must be avoided for the smooth functioning of the group (human relations view).

● It is believed that the conflict is not only a positive force in a group but it is absolutely necessary for a group to perform effectively (interactionist view).

Two distinct organisational groups are linked through the bridges known as inter-group relations. The efficiency and quality of these relationships may have a significant bearing on one or both of the groups' performances and their members' satisfaction.

11.4 COORDINATION - THE KEY TO INTER-GROUP PERFORMANCE

Coordination is at the core of successful inter-group performance and efforts directed towards improving coordination may get affected by a number of factors.

11.4.1 Inter-dependence

The first important aspect we need to know is whether the groups really need coordination. If yes, then the degree of inter-dependence needs to be determined. The types of inter-dependence most frequently identified are pooled, sequential and reciprocal. The following figure adopted from **Stepen** P. **Robbin's** book on Organisational Behaviour explains types of inter-dependence very well, each requiring an increased degree of group interactions.

When two groups function with relative inter-dependence but their combined output contributes to the organisations' overall goals, pooled inter-dependence exists. For example this would describe the relationship between the housekeeping and'the Front Office departments of the hotel. Both are necessary and important for catering to customers but the activities of each department are essentially separate and distinct from the other.

The food and beverage service and production departments and stores department are. sequentially inter-dependent. For example, the information on the number of guest rooms occupied by a group, would be sent by the Front Office to F&B Service department for the food and beverage requirements. This would further go to F&B production department which would prepare the items to be served to the guests. In the sequential inter-dependence, if the group that sends the input does not perform its job properly, the group that is dependent on the first will be significantly affected. In the above example, if the production department fails to prepare a particular course of order because of delay in supply (fresh or otherwise) the F&B service department may have to slow down in their operations.

The most complex form of inter-dependence is reciprocal. In these instances, groups exchange inputs and outputs. For example, marketing department and the accommodation and the F&B service and production departments, are reciprocally inter-dependent. Marketing people in contact with the customers, acquire information about their future needs. The marketing department then relays this back to the accommodation and F&B service and production departments as per the requirements of the customers. The long term implications are that if these departments do not conform to the requirements which the potential customers find desirable, marketing personnel are not going to get bookings. Thus, there is a high level of interdependence among accommodation, F&B service and production and the marketing department. Accommodation, F&B Service and production departments need marketing department for information on customer needs so that they can create their product as per their requirements. Marketing depends on these departments to create products that it can successfully sell. This high degree of dependency requires greater interaction and increased coordination.

11.4.2 Task Uncertainty

Task uncertainty is another aspect as far as tasks in which the groups are involved are concerned and where the question of coordination may arise. For example, the group's tasks range from highly routine to highly non-routine. Hotels handle all kinds of guests/groups everyday for whom laid down regulations are followed. But when it comes to handling an international conference for a period of time where VVIP delegates and other local VVIP mavements are concerned, this activity is unstructured with exceptions and problems that are difficult to analyse because of the security needs.

Highly routine tasks have little variation. Problems that group members face tend to contain few exceptions and are easy to analyse. Such group activities lend themselves to standardised operating procedures.

The key to task uncertainty is that non-routine tasks require more processing information. Tasks with low ,uncertainty tend to be standardized. Further, groups that do such tasks do not have to interact with other groups.

11.4.3 Time and Goal Orientation

Time and goal orientation refers to the difference between groups in terms of their perception of what is important, on the basis of the time frame which governs their work and goal orientation. This may make it difficult for groups with different perceptions to work together and thus make coordination a problem. For example, a sales group would want to sell maximum as its goals center on sales volume, increasing revenue and market share. The customer's ability to pay for the sales it makes, are not its prime concern. But people in the credit department want to ensure that sales are made only to credit-worthy customers. These differences in goals often make it difficult for various groups to communicate. It also makes it more difficult to coordinate their interactions.

Check Your Progress-1

1. What is Inter-group relations ?

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2. What is sequential interdependence ?

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11.5 MANAGING INTER-GROUP RELATIONS

The most simple method and the one with the least involvement of cost for managing inter-group relations is to establish in advance, a set of formalised rules and procedures to specify how group members are to interact with each other.

In large organisations, for example, standard operating procedures for each activity are specified even for recruitment and selection of additional staff. Such rules and procedures would minimise the need for interaction and flow of information between departments. The major drawback here is that it makes the systems and procedures rigid and also that it works well only when they recur often enough to justify rules and procedures for handling them.

If rules and procedures are inadequate the use of the enterprise's hierarchy becomes the primary method for managing inter-group relations. Coordination is achieved by refering problems to a common superior higher in the organisation. The drawback here is that it takes on a lot more time of the superior leaving very little time for other matters.

Use of planning is the next step in facilitating coordination. If each groupldepartment has specific goals for which they.are responsible, then each group/department knows what they are supposed to do. Inter-group tasks and responsibilities are resolved in terms of goals and contributions of each group. Problems may be faced where groups do not have clearly defined goals or where the volume of contacts between groups is high.

Individual members may play specialised roles of liaison which would facilitate communication between two interdependent work groups. But when the groups are large and interactions are frequent, this may not work as there is a limit on an individual's ability to handle a number of informations at the same time. Task forces are also a very useful device for coordinating activities when the numbers of interacting groups are large and more than two or three in number. Task force is a temporary group made up of representatives from different departments. It exists only long enough to solve the problem it was created to handle. After a solution is reached, task force participants return to their respective departments and duties.

When all the previous devices of coordination are no longer adequate because of tasks becoming more complex and delays in decision making, permanent teams may be used as another device for successful coordination. Teams are typically formed around frequently occurring problems. The team members are responsible to the primary functional department and also to the team. When the team has achieved its goals and objectives each member then returns to his or her functional assignment. This form of coordination is popular in camping tourism, where hotel facilities are provided in camps for a particular period of time and once the time is over each member returns to their permanent full time functional assignment.

Whenever through plans, task forces, teams etc. group coordination cannot be maintained, organisations may create integrating departments which are permanent in nature with its members formally assigned to the task of integration between two or more groups. Integrating departments are expensive to maintain as they are permanent in nature but at the same time they tend to be used only when an organisation has a number of groups with conflicting goals and inter-group decisions have a significant impact on the entire organisation's operations. The aforementioned devices may help in managing inter-group relations in terms of effectiveness.

11.6 GROUP PERFORMANCE

The performance and effectiveness of groups depend on a number of interrelated factors. These are as follows :

● the composition, cohesiveness and maturity of the group,

● its structure, the clarification of role differentiation and channels of communication,

● patterns of interaction and group process, and attention to both task and maintenance functions,

● the task to be undertaken and nature of technology,

● management system and style of leadership,

● organisational processes and procedures,

● the social system of the group and the informal organisation, and

● the environment in which the group is working

Though the characteristics and behaviour of the group members are very important, the above mentioned factors still have a great influence in the performance of a group. It is for the manager to keep a vigilant eye on these factors in order to have better performance.

Check Your Progress3

1. How time and goal orientation can create problems in inter-group communication ?

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2. Mention some ways to manage inter-group functioning effectively.

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3. On what factors the performance of a group depends ?

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11.7 LET US SUM UP

Groups are an essential feature in an organisation. Depending on the patterns of the organisation and arrangements for the division of work, groups are formed. In an organisation there may be a requirement for more than one group and each group generally has its own characteristics and behavioural patterns. In such a situation, intergroup relations play a significant role for effective functioning of the groups. In this Unit we have explained how to improve intergroup relations through better coordination and proper management.

11 3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress-I

1. See Sec. 11.3

2. See Sub-sec. 11.4.1

Check Your Progress-2

1. See Sub-sec. 11.4.3

2. Read Sec. 11.5 carefully and then suggest your views on this question.