## Introductory Module - A User's Guide

## UNIT FOUR

**Working in Peer Groups**

**Introduction**

It is generally accepted that the school is a mirror image of its head. Your own school therefore reflects what you are. As an individual, you bring to the work situation certain strengths and weaknesses and will encounter certain opportunities and threats. The familiar acronym SWOT derives from these four factors. Your efforts in creating a better school will depend, therefore, on your understanding of these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and, in the process of managing your school, on the support you get from your peers, subordinates, superiors, and the community. As you have to live and work with these groups, it is important that you learn and understand how to do so in a purposeful and productive way.

It is the aim of this unit to assist you understand group characteristics and expectations and the many methods you can employ which will enable you to work effectively with them. You should note that the choice of a particular method will depend on its usefulness, the needs and expectations of group members and on the subject under consideration. Continuous experimentation with different methods will show you that some methods are more useful and productive than others. You should satisfy yourself that the method you choose at any one time is relevant and appropriate to your situation and what you intend to achieve. You should also be clear about its strengths and weaknesses and how it can be used effectively.

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:
• explain reasons for working in groups
• describe different kinds of group work
• identify factors that contribute to effective group life
• apply group processes in the creation of a better school
• identify, select and use appropriate methods for effective group work.

A group has been defined as a body of three or more people who interact with each other and are bound together by:
• a common purpose
• agreed norms or patterns of behaviour.

*Activity 4.1*
As a head, you may belong to a professional group or groups such as a finance committee at your school, a subject committee or the local branch of a professional association. Identify a professional group to which you belong and consider the points listed in the definition above in the light of your selected group's goals.
(1) What common purpose is shared by your group members?
(2) Is the group governed by any explicit or implicit rules of conduct?
(3) How do the members identify themselves with the group?

**Comments**
Your points for Question 1 may include:
• the need to improve pupil achievement
• the need to improve the conditions under which you all work
• interaction and sharing of information.

Many programmes do not succeed because they lack a common purpose or are poorly planned.
**Why work in and with groups?**
It is difficult to imagine a head who does not appreciate the importance of working with groups. As a school head, your duties involve organizing groups of people to carry out specific tasks to achieve the goals of your school.

*Activity 4.2*
(1) Identify a number of different groups in operation in your school.
(2) Which groups do you work with?
(3) Why are these groups particularly useful to you as head?

**Comments**
For Question 1, you may have identified:
• teachers' year groups
• subject groups
• finance or disciplinary commit tees
• the parent teachers' association
• the school board.

These may be some of the reasons you listed in response to Question 3:
• living as a social being in a group, be it a family or school
• associating and working together for mutual support to solve problems
• meeting individual and collective needs
• carrying out common tasks
• developing desired changes in attitudes, feelings and behaviour.

**Characteristics of an effective group**
*Activity 4.3*
Think of a group which you consider to be particularly effective in its operations.
Identify the characteristics which contribute to its effectiveness.

**Comments**
The effective group is characterised by:
• a group atmosphere which is basically informal, supportive and co-operative
• active participation and interaction between members
• goal planning and organisation
• members being clear and agreed on the group's objectives and the role each member should play
• a sense of cohesion, belonging and a sense of ownership
• freedom to communicate freely
• a set of explicit norms
• a well-defined code of conduct
• effective teamwork
• decision-making by consensus
• leadership acceptable to members and responsive to their needs, attitudes and expectations.

**Team building**
A team is a group of people who work together for a common purpose like a football, rugby or netball team. The players in the team share a set of values and have common goals. Such players are able to depend on support from their colleagues and are also given support as required by their colleagues.
Team building refers to the techniques and processes that you as a head or manager may use to enable individuals in your school to become a team. The grounds, finance and sports committees are examples of teams a school head may need to develop.
Team building is one of your major responsibilities, as a school head.

*Activity 4.4*
What conditions are necessary for effective team building?

**Comments**
Team building is likely to succeed when:
• the culture of the organisation supports a team approach dedicated to getting things done
• team managers and advisers are aware of the 'building blocks' of effective team work
• objectives and goals for the group's work are understood by all
• the organisation is characterised by openness and a lack of confrontation among members ,
• there is support and trust among the members
• the organisation experiences good inter-group relations
• adequate resources exist to help members as they undergo team building.
You should note that this list is not exhaustive in any way.

**The benefits of team building**
*Activity 4.5*
Team building should benefit individual members of the organisation.
List some of these benefits.

**Comments**

Compare your list with the following benefits:
• Members become aware of the support they can receive from peers and colleagues.
• Each individual's abilities and potential are recognised and appreciated.
• Each individual develops a sense of personal achievement and is motivated to continue to work to high standards.
• Each individual is given adequate but not excessive responsibility.
• Team members get the opportunity to develop themselves within the overall goals of the organisation.
• Because individuals participate in forming goals they see them as realistic.
• Individuals are encouraged to try out new ideas and become better performers.
• Individuals can appeal to the expertise of colleagues in the team and become more effective.
• Individual members are able to air problems freely in a supportive atmosphere.

These benefits to individuals combine to form very strong synergy for school development.
You will experience and observe:
• a highly motivated workforce
• less time wasted on internal 'politics'
• high standards of performance
• effective development of staff
• members' talents individually or collectively developed for the benefit of the organisation.

By now you should appreciate the benefits of teamwork to your school as a whole and to individual members.

**Some team building techniques**

Discussion and persuasion will be essential approaches in your efforts to build a team in your school or in a cluster of schools. Coercion of members to form teams may have negative effects on team building.

*Activity 4.6*
Suggest techniques you would use for effective team building in your school.

**Comments**

Here is a list of some of the techniques you could have identified and considered:
• establishing an effective communication system to allow information to reach all members of the team
• encouraging all members of the team to contribute their ideas and feelings freely
• working towards the development of shared values and goals by free open argument and discussion
• developing 'listening skills' in the leader
• carefully planning work with clear and challenging but feasible objectives and achievable targets
• making members aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses and working to

utilise the former and overcome the latter
• encouraging participation in formulating goals and objectives among members
• reviewing, at regular intervals, the way in which the team is developing and then taking appropriate action
• creating situations where the benefits of mutual support become obvious and members learn how to work together
• encouraging members of the team to develop their expertise with appropriate training provided where necessary
• encouraging each individual member, within the overall plan, to contribute his/her expertise to the team
• giving recognition to identified individual member expertise
• encouraging members to praise one another for their efforts
• fading conflict in a positive way and not avoiding it.

**Leading teams**
As head of your school, you work with and through groups and teams of people to achieve desired goals. The extent to which you succeed in achieving these goals may depend on the leadership you provide. The different styles of leadership you could use are similar to the styles of management you will probably have studied in [Module 1, Unit 2](#).

As group or team leader, your colleagues will require of you both task and emotional leadership. You, therefore, need to develop practical and administrative skil1s to organise the groups and teams and keep them running effectively. You will also need sufficient interpersonal skills to enable groups to achieve institutional goals.

Your leadership should be developed in such a way that it becomes a shared responsibility. In this manner, you should be able to guide the members of your various groups to learn both from you and from each other, in a climate of support.

You would be well advised to remember the Chinese philosopher LaoTse, in Henderson (1989, page 48) who said:
a leader is best
when people barely know he exists,
not so good when people acclaim him.
But of a good leader, who talks little,
when his work is done, his aim fulfilled,
they will say 'we did this ourselves'.

You should, therefore, be the kind of leader who not only achieves the school goals through a sense of shared purpose with colleagues, but also one who trains his/her staff to become leaders in their turn. Methods and approaches for group situations In your interaction with groups and teams of people at your school, you may choose to use any of a number of methods and exercises, depending on your aims. Some methods are effective as a means of improving knowledge, when the aim is to help groups learn about ideas. Some will promote the acquisition and practice of skills while others will lead to the exploration of feelings, values, attitudes and prejudices.

*Activity4.7*
Interactive methods can be used in the service of different learning aims.
List interactive methods and indicate the learning goals for each.

**Comments**
Fig 3 shows different interactional methods you may have listed. It also shows the learning outcomes for each method. As head of school, you will need to satisfy yourself that the teaching method you choose to use will meet your intended learning needs.

In the next section we will discuss a selected number of these techniques.
We hope that you will find them useful at the school and cluster levels, in your use of Commonwealth Secretariat modules and other materials written to assist you develop a better and more effective school.

**Brainstorming**
The purpose of brainstorming in a group situation is basically to generate or create as many ideas as possible on a given topic or problem before a decision is made. Initially no comment or judgement is made on the merits or otherwise of the suggestions given. In other words all answers are accepted and recorded. The 'no wrong answer' situation creates a free interaction situation conducive to active participation and imaginative thinking.

It must be noted that brainstorming requires a relaxed atmosphere and good planning if it is to succeed.

*Activity 4.8*
List four important benefits you may derive from using the brainstorming method.

Fig 3 Interactional methods and learning outcomes

| Teaching method | Major learning outcome | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Knowledge | Skill | Attitudes |
| Brainstorming | x | x | |
| Case studies | x | | x |
| Critical incident analysis | x | x | x |
| Demonstrations | | x | |
| Goldfish bowls | x | x | x |
| Games | | x | x |
| Groups (structured/unstructured) | x | x | x |
| Lectures | x | | |
| Role plays | | x | x |
| Soapboxing/Debating | x | | |
| Snowballing | x | | |
| Problem-solving projects | x | x | x |

**Comments**
From Activity 4.8, you probably have realised that brainstorming can be used to achieve the following:
• to gather as much information as possible which can then be used as a basis for making informed decisions or conclusions on the issue at hand
• to allow free expression of feelings or opinions, enabling members to share common experience
• to raise the morale of group members so that they become active in their participation and contributions
• to enable the members to gain a more balanced and holistic view of the issue at hand.

As a human resource technique in the management of groups, it enables the head to gain an insight into feelings/ attitudes of otherwise closed members of the group.

**USING THE BRAINSTORM: CREATING IDEAS**
Stage 1 Group members are invited to list suggestions or give their opinions on a chosen topic. All contributions are accepted without alteration and no comments are made when the suggestions are first received.

You will probably realise that by using this technique, members open up and participate actively, without feeling inhibited.

Stage 2 The options or suggestions received are evaluated and appropriate options selected.

**<u>Case study,</u>**
Mrs Zenye, the head of Zai Secondary School, realises that her students are set on strike action. She is not sure how to proceed to prevent this action taking place in the school. She decides to call an emergency meeting but realises that the staff may not readily have solutions. She then decides on a brainstorming technique to get as many ideas as possible.

*Activity 4.9*
(1) Write down some of the many ideas you think the staff may have suggested.
(2) Explore each statement and say in what way it assists the head to understand her problem.

**Comments**
You may have realised that every brainstorming statement is a relevant pointer to some aspect of the problem. In other words, if the statements are read together in the context of the question at issue, it is possible to achieve a total understanding of the problem.
Here are some of the responses you might have listed:
• Parents must be called to diffuse the situation.
• A meeting with school prefects must be convened.
• A meeting with all senior students must be convened.
• Students must be invited to submit their grievances for consideration.
• Proper channels of communication to encourage dialogue should be created.
• Stubborn students should be punished.
• The head should close the school and have pupils reapply.
• The head should report the situation to the Regional Office and the police.
A clear understanding of the facts and a careful evaluation of the above options should enable the head to decide on an appropriate course of action.

**Soapboxing and debating**
Soapboxing is a method closely related to ordinary debating. Members of groups with opposing ideas or attitudes may use either of these methods to explore their differences and finally see if they can reach a consensus.

*Activity 4.10*
Imagine that you are a member of a cluster of eight school heads who are divided as to whether they should introduce the HIV/AIDS education programme as a subject on their already overcrowded time-table.
(1) Indicate how you would use soapboxing to establish consensus on the matter.
(2) What might be the advantages or disadvantages of using this approach?
(3) What do you see as the chairperson's role in this method?

**Comments**

Soapboxing could be used to establish consensus in any of the following three ways:

1 Each of the cluster members is given 3-5 minutes to express their point of view. Each speaker is strictly timed and no one is allowed to exceed the time limit set above.

2 Members are divided into two opposing camps, on the basis of the views they hold. Both groups plan their case for presentation by their chosen spokesperson.

3 Members are divided into two sub-groups that prepare their case, as in the second method outlined above. However, at this point the spokesperson changes group. Both sub-groups must then explain their argument to the new spokesperson, in such a manner that he/she is able to represent them effectively in the forthcoming debate.

In each case the persuasion and coaching phase is followed by the actual group debate. One of the main advantages of this method is that it gives all members within a group the opportunity to express an opinion and try to persuade others of its relevance and value. After using this method in your school or cluster of school heads, you will find that heads or teachers enjoy the process of finding and collecting the information and presenting it to colleagues. Ideas are found to be more memorable and the sessions become more engaging.

The chairperson is crucial to the success of a debate. He/she requires an intimate knowledge of the potential and abilities of the participants and, if the outcome is to be successful, may be required to give careful coaching on the rules and procedures of debating. The chairperson may also contribute to the success of the debate by providing resource materials to share.

It is the chairperson's role to:

• ensure that a relevant and interesting topic is chosen for consideration during the debate

• use strict ground rules, for example, for length of time allotted to speakers, points of order, comments from the floor or interruptions

• remain impartial at all times.

The chairperson might also draw attention to, among other things:

• how the individual members reacted to others' contributions

• whether any members changed their mind as a result of colleagues' contributions

• how individual members felt when they realised how divided opinion was or how strongly others held to their opinion.

## Case studies

*Activity 4.11*

Turn to Module 1, Unit 2, page 12 and carefully read the case study on Pleasantways High School.

Repeat this activity with the case study on the use of science rooms in Module 4, Unit 2, page 17.

(1) Use these two examples to explain what you understand by case study.

(2) What steps would you take to ensure effective use of the case studies method in your school or cluster of schools?

**Comments**
Reading through the two examples should have helped you understand case studies. You will have probably realised that, like brainstorming, they may be used to introduce topics that are to be discussed or studied further. They provide the first phase of a discussion-based learning session. They may also form an information base for other methods such as role play, simulation and decision-making exercises.

The case study method provides a basis for exploring attitudes and for practicing and getting feedback on skills. It may also be used as a basis for testing the theoretical understanding of learners.

Learners can use case studies to:
• practice and test specific skills such as problem-solving, decision-making or information gathering
• link theory to practice
• explore the processes of applying solutions to problems
• apply learning to complex situations.

The most valuable case studies are drawn from course participants or learners' own experience and illustrate incidents in their daily lives. These can provide a useful and popular basis for discussion. Carelessly framed or selected case studies may prove irritating and confusing to learners. For optimum use of case studies, you therefore need to:
• set your aims clearly
• select appropriate material (or write your own) for an active exercise
• have learners fully prepared for the case studies
• cope with those learners or course participants who tend to resist the task
• cope with the variety of learners' /participants' learning styles
• ensure credibility of the case studies
• ensure that case studies represent a genuine picture of what life is like in schools
• ensure that the case studies will prompt a ready response from learners/participants
• ensure that the case studies are not too long and do not include too wide a spectrum of issues as focusing on the key topic might be more difficult.

You should also note that a case study is best followed by discussion. One of the factors to affect the quality of the discussion will be the quality of the group leader.

*Activity 4.12*
Using the case study in , page 34 list what you see as the strengths of the case studies method.

**Comments**
You may have come up with the following strengths:
• Case studies enable learners to practice various skills such as problem-solving.

• Case studies develop analytical skills.
• Skills in persuasion and teamwork are developed.
• Learners can apply their learning to more complex situations.
• Learners can read the case studies as 'homework' and a lot of time can be saved.

## Critical incident analysis

Critical incident analysis is a method closely related to case studies. An occasion when something has gone particularly well or badly at your work place may be called a critical incident. A careful examination of the individual's intentions, motivation, behaviour and action provides the analysis in this case.

As a school head critical incident analysis enables you to achieve the following:
• detect and identify warning signs of a problem developing
• establish and identify in what way the signs detected may be significant
• find out sources of problems and their causes in the life of the school
• take preventive and corrective action for the smooth running of the school by minimising and pre-empting disruptive incidents.

You should remember that you will experience both 'good' as well as 'bad' critical incidents. You should therefore be prepared to deal with both. Your skill in making critical analyses will contribute to your school self-evaluation and school development planning.

### USING CRITICAL INCIDENT ANALYSIS

In carrying out critical incident analysis, you may wish to use what has become popularly known as the '5W-H' analysis consisting of the following questions:
• Who was involved?
• What happened?
• Where did it happen?
• When did it happen?
• Why did it happen ?
• How did it happen?
You could find this analysis useful in reviewing incidents and in encouraging your students and teachers to establish reasons for and sources of problems or events.

### *Activity 4.13*

A report of a possible leakage of public examinations has been made to you as head of the school. It is alleged that some students have seen a public examination paper which is yet to be taken.
Indicate how you would make an analysis of the situation in order to come to a decision and take appropriate action.

### Comments

You have probably suggested the use of the 'SW-H' analysis for this case.
You will, however, have seen the need for a more detailed checklist, to enable you to analyse such a difficult case systematically. Such a situation analysis may take the following form:

• describe the situation in which the incident occurred
• establish how the students were able to gain access to the papers
• establish fully who was involved
• summarise the actions that were taken immediately you became aware of the incident
• record and compare different versions of the incident

The remedial action might include:
• identify evidence of procedures for avoiding that particular type of incident
• reflect on whether there were any warning signs that you may have missed
• analyse any actions taken by you, or others, that may have precipitated the incident.

You will have probably noticed that critical incident analysis, like case studies, can be used for a variety of objectives including the acquisition of knowledge and information, development of skills and change of attitudes.

**Role play**
Teachers sometimes make use of role play. Role play is a type of experimental learning. It presents spontaneous situations depicting real life situations.

During role play teachers identify clear and achievable objectives for each section. They present details of problems which are significant and relevant to their students.

The selected student actors will then adapt the problems into a short play representing real life situations.

*Activity 4.14*
Now try to adapt Activity 2.4 on page 17 of Module 6, Unit 2 into a role play which can be enacted by your group.
What problems have you encountered within your school in trying to implement changes recommended by school inspectors?

**Comments**
In addition to your own personal experience, you should refer to the list of problems outlined in Module 6, Unit 2, page 18.

*Activity 4.15*
What would you say are the merits and demerits of role play in trying to solve problems?

**Comments**
You will probably have included the following strengths for role play:
• Students acquire skills and gain insight on how to deal with similar situations before experiencing them in real life.
• Students may change their bad habits in the course of the learning process.
• Students learn to appreciate feedback in the form of either approval or criticism from

other members of the group.
• Both students and teachers become actively involved.

However, you will have also realised that role play can be:
• time consuming
• a disadvantage where a bad character may be easily imitated by the audience
• may be difficult to achieve effectively where participants are unused to 'playacting'.

If you wish to use role play effectively, then you need also to consider the role of the tutor and the direction of the role play. In this case the tutor needs to :
• set and clarify the aims carefully
• create and maintain a supportive climate for the role play
• be sensitive to individual potential and allocate roles within the capacity of participants in order to protect individuals from being humiliated or ridiculed
• keep a close watch on what is happening during the role play
• ensure proper coaching of each participant
• give appropriate teaching points during the plenary discussion.

## Simulation
Simulation is another method that may be used in lieu of real life situations.

## Case study
The local member of parliament has offered the constituency funds for building either a library or a beerhall. He has called a meeting of local councilors together with six heads of schools and twenty four members from each of the six Parents Teachers' Associations to discuss the issue and come up with a decision so that the building starts before the rainy season.

### Activity 4.16
State the points that might be advanced in favour of either the library or the beerhall.

## Comments
You may need to stage an actual simulation exercise of this case study in your school or cluster of schools, in order to determine the effectiveness of this method of group learning. Depending on the situation in different schools and communities, your groups may make the following suggestions.

One group may say the library is more important because:
• children will get books for reference
• the community will have reference materials
• it will increase opportunities for learning.

The other group may prefer the beerhall because:
• it will generate more funds
• it will provide entertainment
• it will keep people busy.

**Project method**

Many teachers use the project method because it is activity based. Your group may want to try a group project.

**PRO|ET GUIDELINES**

*Stage 1* Select a project topic from any of the modules.
*Stage 2* Plan your project.
Your plan could include identifying the objectives and activities to be accomplished, the allocation of tasks to each member of the group, methods of presentation and deadline dates for completion of each section and consolidation of the whole project.
*Stage 3* Identify techniques for collecting information for the project.
You might want to choose from interviews, questionnaires, newspapers, magazines and from libraries.
*Stage 4* Choose the method of presentation for the project.
You could present a discussion or dramatisation, make a wall frieze or contribute an article to your local magazine.

*Activity 4.17*
Having conducted a group project, what would you say are the merits and demerits of the approach?

**Comments**

Your observations probably included the following merits and demerits.
During project work group members:
• acquire and develop several thinking skills of planning, investigating, collecting, organising and presenting ideas
• learn a lot from each other
• learn to appreciate differences of opinion
• become involved in continuous education
• learn to apply knowledge gained
• develop self-control.

However, project work:
• is time consuming
• can result in members getting bored, unless strictly defined
• may give rise to conflict within the group.

**Snowballing**

Snowballing is another group participatory method you might try. The method aims to encourage the involvement of every participant in a given task and to encourage their contribution towards the outcomes.

It starts with individual members giving thought to a problem. Individuals then regroup in pairs, threes, fours, fives, etc. until finally the whole group discusses the problem.

*Activity 4.18*
This example of snowballing is based on Activity 1.1. on page 4 of [Module 6](#).
*Stage 1:* Each member should write down ten ways in which an effective school can be recognised.
*Stage 2:* Compare the lists of answers in twos or threes.
*Stage 3:* Compare and discuss the lists in fours or fives.
*Stage 4:* Each group displays lists for discussion by the whole group.

**Comments**
It will be useful for you to compare your contributions with the lists given in [Module 6](#), pages 4 and 5.

*Activity 4.19*
Suggest reasons why snowballing may be popular with groups as an approach.

**Comments**
Which of the following reasons did you come up with?
• the dominance of speakers who try to monopolise the discussion is reduced
• individuals can be given extra assistance
• individual group members participate fully
• more use can be made of different abilities and a wider mix of ideas
• individuals develop confidence as their different abilities are accommodated.

**Goldfish bowls**
The goldfish bowl is another popular group method used during discussion and problem-solving sessions. It relies on voluntary or impromptu responses from participants. The approach can be open or closed.

**OPEN GOLDFISH BOWLS**
*Activity 4.20*
This example of an open goldfish bowl is based on Activity 2.4 on page 13 of [Module 1](#).
*Stage 1:* Ask the members to sit in two circles. Those sitting in the inner circle will be the 'discussants', those in the outer circle, the 'observers'.
*Stage 2:* Two chairs in the inner circle are left empty. During the discussion they will be occupied by members from the 'observer' group sitting in the outer circle.
*Stage 3:* Members of the inner circle initiate the discussion on Activity 2.4.
*Stage 4:* Two members from the outer circle (observers) should occupy the two empty chairs, in the inner circle, when they want to contribute to the discussion. Once they finish they go back to their original positions leaving the chairs for the others who might have something to say.
*Stage 5:* Allow observers from the outer circle time to make analytical comments on what they saw in the discussion or debate.

**Comments**
In their critical comments the observers should note what effect the discussion had on

them. Comments could also focus on whether individuals were listened to. The method is a useful way of trying to change attitudes towards contentious issues.

**CLOSED GOLDFISH BOWLS**
*Activity 4.21*
Your group could also try the closed goldfish bowl.
*Stage 1:* Group members sit, as before, in two circles. They occupy all the chairs.
*Stage 2:* Members from both the inner and the outer circles discuss or debate a given topic (opposing views should be adopted by the two circles).
*Stage 3:* The group leader summarises the discussion emphasising the key points.

It should be noted that this arrangement allows less variety of input into the centre circle as members remain discussants or debators from the beginning to the end. The advantage of the open goldfish over this closed alternative becomes clear as everybody is encouraged to debate in the former.

**Summary**
In this unit you have looked at how you may work in and with groups to achieve your personal, school and system goals. You have considered how teams could be built and used. The unit has also introduced you to a variety of methods that you could use to interact with the various groups involved in your work. You should have noted that the methods can be used in the service of the different learning aims of knowledge, skills and attitudes. You should, therefore, choose a method that meets not only your particular situation but also your intended learning goal.

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