# Effective Group Discussion

## *Theory and Practice*

Fifteenth Edition

*Gloria Galanes*
*Katherine Adams*

Mc Graw Hill Education

FIFTEENTH EDITION

# EFFECTIVE GROUP DISCUSSION

## Theory and Practice

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EFFECTIVE GROUP DISCUSSION: THEORY AND PRACTICE, FIFTEENTH EDITION

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# Preface

The challenge of incorporating important new information without increasing the length of the text continues with this 15th edition. We have worked hard to remove redundancies and to streamline the information with the goal of updating the text without lengthening it.

Our focus continues to be *communication:* how communication creates, maintains, and changes a group through interaction among members and with the group's environment. We encourage members and leaders to employ effective and ethical principles of communication, so their group experiences are as rewarding as they can be. We continue to highlight bona fide group theory, which we believe has contributed significantly to our understanding of how real-world groups actually work. We also note that the technology available to help groups has become much more affordable and accessible than when we first started writing. To that end, we discuss groups not as *either* face-to-face *or* virtual, but as entities that can use a variety of technologies to assist their work and as existing on a continuum from purely face-to-face to purely virtual. We incorporate information about technology throughout the text.

When our students complete their study of small groups, we hope they will know how to use the information and tools we present to understand why one group is satisfying and another feels like torture. Most important of all, we hope they will understand what they can *do* about it. Thus, as with previous editions, this book is based in current research; our advice to students stems from what we know about communication and small groups.

*Effective Group Discussion* focuses on secondary groups, such as work groups, committees, task forces, self-directed work teams, and other small groups including virtual ones with tasks to complete. The text provides practical tips and also serves well as a reference source for advanced communication students, consultants, or group leaders.

## Overview

Generally, the chapters move the discussion from group systems inputs to throughput processes to outcomes. Instructors have the flexibility to skim or skip chapters or cover them in a different order. For instance, a section in Chapter 2 covers basic communication theory for students without a previous communication course, but this section can be skimmed quickly if it reviews material students already know.

Part I presents an overview of small group and human communication theory. Chapter 1 introduces several ideas developed in subsequent chapters: the importance of small groups in our lives, types of groups, how many groups use technology, what constitutes ethical behavior, and why members should become participant-observers

in their groups. Chapter 2 presents the basics of communication theory that serve as the foundation for studying small groups. In Chapter 3, we present systems theory as the organizing framework used throughout the text.

Part II begins the discussion of group developing by focusing on the members, the main small group inputs. Chapter 4 introduces the importance of diversity and the contribution that members' cultures and co-cultures make to that diversity. Chapter 5 discusses how member characteristics contribute to the roles that members play in groups, including an enhanced section about the relationship of the "Big Five" personality characteristics from psychology to what happens in small groups.

Part III focuses on the development of the group as an entity by presenting information about a variety of throughput processes. Chapter 6 consolidates logically the information about norms, fantasy themes, and cohesiveness. Chapters 7 and 8 are companion leadership chapters. Chapter 7 focuses on the theoretical concepts necessary to understanding leadership, and Chapter 8 provides practical suggestions for group leaders.

Part IV discusses the importance of having appropriate problem-solving and decision-making processes to improve the quality of group outputs. As with leadership, Chapters 9 and 10 are paired, with Chapter 9 providing conceptual information for understanding problem solving and decision making and Chapter 10 providing specific suggestions and techniques for improving problem-solving and decision-making processes. Chapter 11 focuses on how conflict, if managed well, can improve group outputs.

In Part V, Chapter 12 presents tools for assessing and improving small groups. Users of the text told us they preferred to have this chapter placed at the end, following discussions of theories and concepts. However, these tools and assessments can easily be used throughout the text to enhance discussion of concepts, if instructors prefer.

There are two appendices to this edition. Appendix A guides members in how to gather and organize their informational resources in preparation for problem solving and decision making. Although this information conceptually precedes Chapters 9 and 10, most upper-division students already know how to gather information. Appendix B discusses the public presentation of a group's work, including how to organize presentations so the information is presented smoothly and seamlessly. In the previous edition, we incorporated a third appendix covering technology in groups; this material is integrated throughout the text, so we removed this appendix.

## New Edition Changes

This 15th edition of *Effective Group Discussion* retains the reorganization of the 14th edition, which fits the way many instructors have told us they prefer to teach.

- We have retained our research base, have consolidated conceptual information where possible, removed material and examples that seemed redundant or out-of-date, and added current theoretical information.
- We have integrated each chapter's opening case more thoroughly with the information presented throughout the chapter.
- Small group techniques are integrated throughout the text so that students can more readily link the concepts to the techniques.
- We have sharpened our focus on communication to emphasize its centrality to groups, as members mutually negotiate shared meaning.

- We have continued to develop our discussion of technological issues, grounding our discussions on the idea of a continuum of technological use, from purely face-to-face to purely virtual.
- We have incorporated information about the "Big Five" personality characteristics, from psychology, to describe their impact on the communication behavior of small group members.
- We have sharpened and strengthened our discussion of ethics throughout the text.
- Information about leadership and problem solving/decision making can be overwhelming. We kept the companion chapters devoted to each topic from the 14th edition. The first provides theoretical and conceptual information and the second provides more practical information, techniques, and tips.
- We have retained the Recap boxes placed throughout the chapters.
- As always, we have updated this edition with the most current research available.

## Features

***Case Studies:*** Each chapter begins with a case study illustrating that chapter's main points. These are real-life stories designed to help students retain key concepts and understand how that chapter's information is relevant to the real world. We link these case studies explicitly to information presented throughout the chapter.

***Recap Boxes:*** We have placed Recap boxes—internal summaries—throughout each chapter. They provide logical "breathing places" for students to review what they have learned.

***Emphasis on Diversity:*** The importance of diversity and intercultural communication cannot be overemphasized! In addition to a chapter devoted to this topic, relevant information about diversity is distributed throughout the text, and we have provided a more global perspective that reflects our changing world.

***Learning Aids:*** Each chapter includes *learning objectives* and *margin key terms*, which are boldfaced in the text. The end of chapter material includes *Questions for Review* and a *Bibliography* that provides additional reading material. The *Glossary* at the end of the text provides definitions of all key terms.

***Connect*** provides online activities for students that supplement the topics in the chapter. Tools and activities include interactive quizzes and lecture slides. Videos covering Nonverbal Messages, Defensive/Supportive Communication, Aggressive/Assertive Communication, The Employment Interview, Small Group Communication, and Presentation are also available.

## Resources for Instructors

***Connect*** provides the instructor's manual (containing sample syllabi, lecture notes, additional exercises, writing assignments, and up-to-date web links), a testbank of objective and essay questions, and PowerPoint slides.

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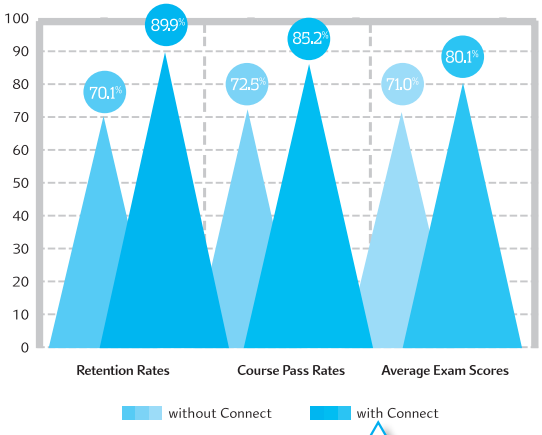


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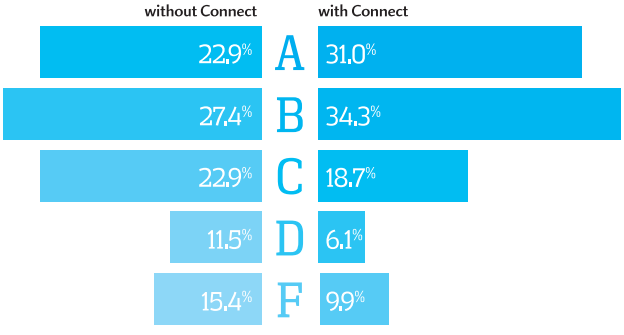


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We would like to thank all of the instructors and students who have used *Effective Group Discussion.* We welcome your written reactions to its content and composition. You can send your comments to us via the Department of Communication, Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri; or the Department of Communication, California State University, Fresno, California.

May all your groups be enjoyable and satisfying!

Numerous people contributed to this book; we can name only a few. First, we acknowledge our debt to instructors and writers Freed Bales, Ernest Bormann, Elton S. Carter, B. Aubrey Fisher, Larry Frey, Kenneth Hance, Randy Hirokawa, Sidney J. Parnes, J. Donald Phillips, M. Scott Poole, Linda Putnam, Marvin Shaw, Victor Wall, and W. Woodford Zimmerman.

Finally, we want to acknowledge the vision and contributions of Jack Brilhart, who died in 2005. Jack wrote the first version of this text in the late 1960s as one monograph in a communication series. For many years, Jack shared his expertise, his passion for understanding and working with small groups, and his vast experience working with a variety of groups. We enjoyed working with him, appreciated his generosity, and greatly miss him.

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# The Foundations of Communicating in Groups

The three chapters in Part I provide the focus to your study of small group communication. Chapter 1 introduces important terms and concepts used throughout the text. Chapter 2 lays the groundwork for understanding the communicative dynamics of small group interaction. Chapter 3 presents systems theory as a framework for studying and understanding small groups.

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PART I

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# The Small Groups in Everyone's Life

CHAPTER 1

**STUDY OBJECTIVES**

As a result of studying Chapter 1, you should be able to:

1. Explain the need for understanding small group communication and for participating productively in small group discussions.
2. Be familiar with some of the ways technology can help a group be more productive.
3. Correctly distinguish the terms presented in this chapter, particularly *group, small group, small group discussion*, and *ethics*.
4. Describe the difference between primary and secondary groups.
5. Consciously and intentionally become a participant–observer during group discussions.
6. Describe the six ethical principles most relevant to small group communication.

**CENTRAL MESSAGE**

If you want to succeed in modern organizational and social life, you must understand how to be a productive group member and act accordingly, including knowing how technology can benefit a group's work.

Springfield, Missouri, where one of us lives, has a two-day art festival each May, attended by 15,000 to 20,000 people. Artsfest also offers music and dance performers of all kinds, food vendors, and hands-on activities for children. This combination art show and community festival requires the efforts of hundreds of people. Artsfest is organized by a committee of volunteers working with representatives of the Springfield Regional Arts Council and the Urban Districts Alliance. The large committee of 15 includes LaShonda, an artist whose contacts extend throughout the region. She is mainly responsible for artist recruitment and correspondence. Raj is a technology guru who manages Artsfest's social media campaigns on Facebook and Twitter. Pam is a long-time community volunteer who knows everyone and is a lot of fun to work with. Her extensive lists of contacts provide the core of volunteers who work at the event, handling artist check-in, managing registration, taking gate receipts, selling T-shirts and souvenirs, providing security, and so forth. In addition, Pam encourages a warm and relaxed atmosphere in group meetings—she usually brings cookies. Jerry and Selena, the event coordinators, are both well-organized individuals who are not thrown by the level of detail that must be handled. Selena's planning book keeps details of prior festivals at her fingertips. She knows exactly how many T-shirts were ordered in prior years, how many artists were new to the festival, and how much money was made in soft-drink sales. Jerry's list of corporate sponsors is extensive; if one sponsor decides to drop out, he has three possibilities lined up to replace that sponsor.

The committee meets every other week January through March and weekly in April, with committee members keeping in touch with one another via technology between meetings. For example, committee members used Dropbox to view and make suggestions for wording on artist recruitment letters and other documents. When an issue arose between meetings that needed a quick answer, members voted by e-mail. The committee's normal meeting location was unexpectedly unavailable at one meeting; members were notified by text message of the temporary location. Jerry had to be out of town during one important meeting just before the event; the committee used Skype so he could participate. Members frequently call or text one another between meetings as they think of things that need to be handled.

This example illustrates an important point: one person alone does not have what it takes to accomplish a complex task. Working together, however, individuals in a group can achieve far more than individuals working alone. And with the advent of easy-to-use technologies, group members can make their participation in groups even more effective.

Small groups are the basic building blocks of our society.[1] Lawrence Frey, a leading scholar of small group communication, believes as we do that the small group is *the* most important social formation:

> Every segment of our society—from the largest multinational organization to the political workings of federal, state, city, and local governments to the smallest community action group to friendship groups to the nuclear and extended family—relies on groups to make important decisions, socialize members, satisfy needs, and the like.[2]

We spend a tremendous amount of time in groups. In the business world alone, executives spend on average half of their time in meetings,[3] adding up to an estimated 20 million business meetings a day in the United States,[4] and this time spent in meetings only increases over time![5] When you add to this the amount of time we spend informally in groups outside of work, you begin to appreciate how pervasive groups are in our lives. However, poorly managed meetings hurt the very businesses they are supposed to support, wasting valuable time and resources and losing as much as $37 billion in the United States alone each year.[6] Moreover, the ability to function effectively as part of a group requires skills that must be understood and practiced. Over 70 percent of respondents from 750 leading U.S. companies, in a national survey, ranked the "ability to work in teams" as a more essential skill for MBA graduates than knowledge of statistical techniques.[7] Learning to be a good team member is essential to our personal, professional, and social lives.

To start off, we want you to consider three important ideas about groups. First, *the formation of groups is natural to humans.* Why? Groups are a fundamental way humans meet important needs. Schutz explained that we use groups to belong and identify with others (inclusion), find openness (formerly called affection), and exercise power over others and our environment (control).[8] Notice that each of these three needs mandates the participation of others and is so significant to us that often we will relinquish our own resources, such as time and energy, to participate in groups and satisfy our basic human needs. For example, citizens of Springfield, Missouri, worked to transform a decaying downtown space into Founders Park, a public green space in the city's center. By assembling in the various groups needed to accomplish their goal, these citizens worked hard because the issue was important to each of them, and they understood it could not happen without their collective efforts.

David Brooks, a national political and cultural commentator, speculated that humans are wired to cooperate and collaborate, just as much as they are to compete. Groups provide a vehicle by which we can do this.[9] Stop for a moment and think about all the groups you have participated in this past week, including family and peer groups. College students average about 8 to 10, and sometimes list as many as 24 groups. For example, one student listed the following: family, Bible study, sorority, executive committee of sorority, study group in small group class, project group in marketing class, intramural volleyball team, carpool, and work group of clerks in clothing department.

Does this seem like a lot of groups? Consider this: Reliance on groups in our society is increasing and expected to increase further, perhaps dramatically. American managers recognize the value of participative decision making, with the small group as one important vehicle for encouraging employee participation and improving corporate decision making.[10] Top management teams are acknowledged as the most influential groups in organizations today.[11] Monster.com, a popular employment website for college students, lists teamwork as one of the "hot skills" in demand from managers, no matter the size or type of their industry.[12] Even further, Monster.com counselors recommend that all college first-year students join a club to practice their group skills.[13]

Why is group work successful? Groups are usually better problem solvers, in the long run, than solitary individuals because they have access to more information than individuals do, can spot flaws and biases in each others' thinking, and then can think of things an individual may have failed to consider. Moreover, if people participate in planning the work of solving the problem, they are more likely to work harder and better at carrying out the solution. Thus, participation in problem solving and decision making helps guarantee continued commitment to decisions and solutions (see Chapter 9).

Second, *just because we often participate in groups, we cannot assume we participate effectively.* Unless we know something about why a group is unproductive, we won't be able to assess what is happening in our groups or know what to do with that assessment to help the group improve. **Grouphate** captures a negative attitude toward groups that can get in the way of effective participation in groups.[14] In spite of recognizing the central role of groups in our lives, we often have mixed feelings about them, due in large measure to the tradeoffs involved. In return for meeting our needs, we give up autonomy and the ability to do whatever we want, whenever we want. For instance, students often complain that group grades do not reflect their superior individual performance. Some people may even loathe being a member of a group.[15] Interestingly, grouphate is partly caused by lack of training in how to communicate effectively as a group member. It is in your best interests to get over any feelings of grouphate because students with negative feelings and attitudes about participating in groups have been less successful academically than those with more constructive and positive orientations toward group work.[16]

**Grouphate**

The feeling of antipathy and hostility many people have about working in a group, fostered by the many ineffective, time-wasting groups that exist.

Strong communication skills are central to effective discussion and productive teamwork. Donald Petersen, former CEO of Ford Motor Company, initially envisioned himself as a solitary engineer designing cars, yet discovered that his success came from interaction and teamwork. "Communication skills are crucial. And I mean that in both directions—not only the ability to articulate . . . but to listen."[17]

Third, *groups provide the vehicle by which the individual can make a contribution to the organization and the society as a whole.* Larkin postulated that humans have a motivation to give. The basic ingredient cementing social cohesion is not the satisfaction of needs, but rather the availability for contribution. What best binds individuals to groups may not be so much the pressure to obtain necessities as the opportunities to give of oneself to something beyond merely self-interested acquisition.[18] The dignity of individuals, Lawson states, comes from people's contributions to something greater than themselves. People who give of their time, money, energy, and other resources live healthier, happier, and more fulfilled lives; they report that their lives are more meaningful than those who do not.[19] This is confirmed in research by Strubler and York, who found that team members felt a greater sense of participation and believed their work within the organization was more meaningful and worthwhile than non-team members.[20]

Our focus is the communicative dynamics of group members—what people say and do in groups. While we will draw upon findings from other disciplines, we will concentrate on the process of communication among members and how group members can influence this process. The groups we examine will cover a range of group settings: educational, religious, political, corporate, entertainment, health,

community, and social services. As you study the central concepts we will be using throughout this text, remember that the complexity of small group interaction among members cannot be reduced to a cookie cutter set of prescriptions. Each element of group interaction influences every other element in the group (see Chapter 3). So while we give you guidelines and suggestions to consider, you have to take into account the group's entire and unique situation as you enact these guidelines.

In the remainder of this chapter, we present definitions of key terms we use throughout the book to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding. We also present information about the types of groups you will encounter in many different kinds of settings. We end with a discussion of ethical behavior important to effective group functioning in Western cultures and centered around a participant–observer perspective.

## What Is Small Group Discussion?

Before we define how we view small group communication, we will begin with a big picture, then move to specifics. The first term requiring definition is **group.** What differentiates a *collection* of people from a *group* of people? Don't worry if you have a hard time putting your own definition into words; no single definition of *group* exists among those who study groups for a living. Among the variety of definitions for *group*, we prefer Marvin Shaw's: a group consists of "persons who are interacting with one another in such a manner that each person influences and is influenced by each other person."[21] Shaw argued that, of all the characteristics of groups, none were more important than *interaction* and *mutual influence.*

**Group**

Three or more people with an interdependent goal who interact and influence each other.

The Artsfest Planning Committee simply collected in one place does not necessarily constitute a group unless there is reciprocal awareness and influence among members. If, for example, LaShonda, Jerry, and Pam each write separate letters to recruit an artist to apply, Shaw would argue that no group exists yet because Jerry and Pam did not influence LaShonda in recruiting particular artists. However, once the members begin to interact with each other and talk about how to pool their efforts to recruit artists, then we see a group emerging out of their interaction. Interaction assumes coordination of behaviors.[22] More fundamentally, interaction "requires mutual influence."[23]

The Artsfest committee members share a related key feature of a group: an **interdependent goal.** Interdependence exists when all group members succeed or fail together in the accomplishment of the group's purpose—in this case, having a successful festival can be attained only if they coordinate their efforts. In addition, committee members coordinated their actions so that artists, food vendors, volunteers, and so forth, all showed up at the right times on the right days. This logic extends to group members scattered geographically. If members interact and mutually influence each other by way of newsletters, telephone conversations, computer networks, or closed-circuit TV, they still constitute a group. The Artsfest committee, although not geographically scattered, influenced each other via their e-mail, phone, text, Skype, and Dropbox correspondence.

**Interdependent Goal**

An objective shared by members of a small group in such a way that one member cannot achieve the goal without the other members also achieving it.

The study of groups may include large groupings (e.g., whole societies) or small ones; our focus is on small groups. The notion that "each person influences and is

**Small Group**

A group of at least three but few enough members for each to perceive all others as individuals, share some identity or common purpose, and share standards for governing their activities as members.

influenced by each other" implies that members are aware of each other, and from this mutual awareness we ground our definition of *small* on perceptual awareness. A **small group,** therefore, is a group small enough that each member is aware of and able to recall each other group member, know who is and is not in the group, and recognize what role each is taking. Attempts to define *small* on the basis of number of members have never worked. Practically, small groups are usually comprised of three to seven members with five being the most effective.[24]

No doubt you have heard and used the word *team* and might wonder whether there is difference between a small group and a team. Some scholars see teams as highly functioning groups with a strong group identity and highly structured with very explicit rules and clearly defined member responsibilities.[25] Others reserve *team* for groups in which leadership is shared, such as the case with self-managed work groups.[26] In a comprehensive review of the research into team dynamics, Salas, Sims, and Burke discovered a recurring theme in all the different definitions of *team*: the recognition of interdependence between members as they strive toward a group goal.[27] Thus, we do not differentiate the two terms—*group* and *team*—and use them interchangeably. A small group may be called a team (e.g., top management team), yet function no better than other groups of its kind. Like LaFasto and Larson, we are interested in groups that function well, no matter what they are called.[28]

**Small Group Discussion**

A small group of people communicating with each other to achieve some interdependent goal, such as increased understanding, coordination of activity, or solution to a shared problem.

Interaction, mutual influence, and interdependence are all central features of a group. Coordinating behavior requires exchange of messages; thus, the most central feature of human groups is their communication. Verbal and nonverbal exchange among group members is where the work of the group gets accomplished. This exchange may be face-to-face or may use computer or audioconferencing equipment. For our purposes, **small group discussion** (see Table 1.1) refers to a small group of people talking with each other in order to achieve some interdependent goal, such as increased understanding, coordination of activity, or a solution to a shared problem.

**TABLE 1.1**
**Small group discussion characteristics**

1. Small enough (typically between three and seven) for each member to be aware of and have some reaction to each other.
2. A mutually interdependent purpose, making the success of any one member contingent upon the success of all.
3. Each member has a sense of belonging to the group.
4. The give and take of impromptu communication, involving both verbal and nonverbal messages, as group members respond to and adapt their actions to each other.
5. A sense of cooperation between members, even in disagreements and conflict, where they perceive that they are pursuing a group outcome that will be satisfactory to everyone.
6. Interaction that occurs on a continuum from purely face-to-face to virtual. Most groups today use some form of technology in conjunction with their face-to-face group work, and even if their interaction is totally virtual, all the characteristics mentioned here still apply.

## Recap: A Quick Review

Human beings are social creatures and form groups naturally. Groups are so pervasive in our lives that we may overlook their importance. Even though negative experiences working in groups can turn many people away from group work, the fact of the matter is that effective small group interaction has profound practical consequences in our personal and professional lives.

1. People use groups to meet inclusion, control, and openness needs. Group participation allows people to make significant contributions to each other and society.
2. Being a group participant does not guarantee effective group behavior; group members have to work to coordinate their actions toward a shared goal.
3. Groups are not merely collections of individuals, but they involve interaction, interdependence, and mutual influence.
4. Small groups are not defined by the number of people in a group but by their limits of perceptual awareness.
5. Small group discussion highlights the key role communication plays in defining a collection of people as a small group with a sense of belonging, purpose, and collaboration.

## Types of Small Groups

There are two major categories of small groups, *primary* and *secondary*. Each meets different human needs.

**Primary groups** exist chiefly to satisfy *primary* needs—needs for inclusion (affiliation, belonging) and openness. They are usually long term. Examples include a nuclear family, roommates, several friends who meet daily around a table in the student center, and co-workers who regularly share coffee breaks. Although such groups may tackle particular tasks, they exist mainly to provide personal attention and support for the members. Members' talk, which appears spontaneous and informal, is the end in itself. More than any other forces in our lives, primary groups socialize and mold us into the people we become; their importance is tremendous. For most of us, the family is our first group, where we learn communication patterns, functional and dysfunctional, that can last generations and affect all aspects of our lives.[29] Primary groups are not the main focus of this book; typically, primary groups are studied in interpersonal and family communication, sociology, and psychology courses. However, the interpersonal relationships at the heart of primary groups are very important to understanding small groups in general.

**Primary Group**
A group whose main purpose is to meet members' needs for inclusion and openness.

**Secondary groups,** like our Artsfest committee in the opening story, focus on task accomplishment and are formed for the purpose of doing work—completing a project, solving a problem, making a decision. Secondary groups, such as most work teams and problem-solving groups, meet secondary needs for control and achievement. Such groups enable members to exert power over their environment and others. For example, the search and rescue teams who helped Haiti after the 2010 earthquake

**Secondary Group**
A group whose major purpose is to complete a task, such as making a decision, solving a problem, writing a report, or providing recommendations to a parent organization.