

Group Member Roles

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the different types of members that can be found in many workplace groups, and how they can impact one another. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Positive and Negative Member Roles

As you will see, notions of positive and negative attitudes and behaviors will often depend on the context when discussing groups.

➔ **EXAMPLE** If someone in your group always makes everyone laugh, that can be a distinct asset when the news is less than positive. At times when you have to get work done, however, the "class clown" may become a distraction.

Still, there are several roles that generally take on either a positive or negative context, as highlighted in the table below.

Positive Role	Description
Initiator-Coordinator	Suggests new ideas or new ways of looking at the problem
Elaborator	Builds on ideas and provides examples
Coordinator	Brings ideas, information, and suggestions together
Evaluator-Critic	Evaluates ideas and provides constructive criticism
Recorder	Records ideas, examples, suggestions, and critiques
Negative Role	Description
Dominator	Dominates discussion, not allowing others to take their turn
Recognition-Seeker	Relates discussion to their accomplishments; seeks attention
Special-Interest Pleader	Relates discussion to a special interest or personal agenda
Blocker	Obstructs attempts at consensus consistently
Joker/Clown	Seeks attention through humor and distracts group members

Note that not all of these roles will be present in every group, and some members may demonstrate several of these traits throughout the life of a group.



Do any of these roles look familiar? Think of the roles you tend to play. Are you typically in a positive role? A negative one? Does it depend on the situation? If you are not happy with the role you play, reflect on changes you can make to alter your role the next time you are in that same situation.

2. Nuance in Group Roles

Now that we've examined a classical view of positive and negative group member roles, let's return to that initial point we raised: While some personality traits and behaviors may negatively influence groups, some are positive or negative depending on the context.

IN CONTEXT

Just as the class clown can have a positive effect in lifting spirits or a negative effect in distracting members, a dominator may be exactly what is needed for quick action. An emergency physician doesn't have time to ask all the group members in the emergency unit how they feel about a course of action; instead, a self-directed approach based on training and experience may be necessary.

In contrast, the pastor of a church may have ample opportunity to ask members of the congregation their opinions about a change in the format of Sunday services; in this situation, the role of coordinator or elaborator is more appropriate than that of dominator.

Remember that a group is formed because it has a purpose or goal, and normally the members together are capable of more than any one individual member could be on their own, so it would be inefficient to hinder that progress. But a blocker, who cuts off collaboration, does just that.

➞ **EXAMPLE** If a group member interrupts another and presents a viewpoint or information that suggests a different course of action, the point may be well taken and serve the collaborative process. But if that same group member repeatedly engages in blocking behavior, then the behavior becomes a problem.

A skilled business communicator will learn to recognize the difference, even when positive and negative aren't completely clear.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the different roles that can emerge when working within or observing a group. There are both **positive and negative member roles** that may arise, although the presence of **nuance in group roles** means that certain behaviors may be positive in some contexts and negative in others. Strong self and social awareness skills will help you to appropriately interpret group member roles in different contexts.

Best of luck in your learning!

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