

# Group Dynamics

## CAP Officer Basic Course

### Introduction

This lesson discusses groups and how people interact within a group. By definition, every organization is a group unto itself. Most of the time, there are smaller formal and informal groups contained within. For the purpose of this lesson, we will confine our discussion to formal groups.

Regardless of the size or the purpose, every group has similar characteristics. All groups are formed around a goal, and all groups share formal and informal roles; thought titles may differ. All groups share a common structure and have status conveyed and norms contained within. Finally, all groups have some level of conflict. This lesson examines each of these areas.

### 1. List three types of organization members used in CAP.

Junior officers usually organized into one of three types, line officers, staff officers and committees. These terms are not "official," but are used here to differentiate between the functions they serve.

Line officers are those in the chain of command, and whom can direct others. They range from the cadet squad leader to the National Commander. Line officers usually have the word commander or leader in their title. They have been given the title and authority to do something, and the role they play is that of a formal leader. This is the person who is appointed by those higher up in the organization hierarchy to lead a team or group towards the desired goal(s). The authority for the formal leader derives from the structure of the organization itself, and flows from the top down. An example might be Deputy Commander for Cadets (DCC). The Cadet Commander, Leadership, Aerospace and Testing Officer likely report to the DCC. He has been given the authority to give direction and discipline subordinates as well as the responsibility to carry out all five components in the cadet program. He can give direction to those below him in the chain of command (the Testing Officer for example) but not those in other parts of the organization (like the Administration Officer).

This contrasts to the staff officer who has the role of providing assistance, counsel or service to others (solicited or not). It does not come with the right to direct or discipline. They help line officers who rely on the staff officer's level of expertise and ability to make, or prevent things from happening. The Personnel Officer (DP) is a good example. If the squadron commander wants to promote the AEO then the paperwork is processed by the DP. The DP will ensure that the AEO is qualified for promotion and advise the squadron commander. If the AEO is not qualified, the DP will advise the commander on what the AEO needs to do to become qualified.

The third role for a member is that of a committee member. One might be assigned to the Awards and Decorations Committee which makes recommendations on who should be the Cadet of the Year. Or one might be on a functional committee like the one planning and running the squadron open house. Committees can have a lot of value if the members are qualified, informed and interested. They access a variety of experts, they can solve problems the line officers can not, they make a good deal of manpower available and they give the members a feeling like they are contributing to the success of the organization or activity.

On the other hand sometimes one person could make a better decision, conflicts within committees often mean that the committee compromises to reach a "good-enough" answer,

and they take time away from time spent on primary duties. Care should be taken when deciding whether to form a committee to achieve a goal.

## **2. Describe the structure of a group, identify status and norms of a group.**

In this lesson, a group is three or more people collected together for a common purpose and with the members recognizing they are part of the group. Within groups members each have formal and informal roles, and there are status ranks and norms which form the structure of the group.

### **ROLES**

Roles are functions people perform in the group, and can either be formal or informal. Formal roles have rigid expectations on behavior and limits on authority. Formal roles typically also carry titles which make it easy for group members to discern the role other members play. In CAP examples include, commander, operations officer, cadet first sergeant, incident commander, ground branch director. Formal roles in CAP are often shown in organizational charts, or described in its regulations.

In addition to formal roles, each member of a group also has an informal role, having nothing to do with their formal title, but having everything to do with how they are perceived by their fellow members.

For example the initiator is the person that gets things started. Often this is the formal leader who is giving a task to the group. But it can also be the person who says things like "I know how to do that, what we need to do is ..." or "What if we ..." or "How about..." Every group needs an initiator to get things started and set a goal. The initiator is often an informal leader.

The informal leader is someone within the group who is perceived by their peers (and others) as a person who is worthy of having attention paid to them and/or to follow them. Often, the informal leader is unaware that they even have the role. It is important to remember that this person does not hold a formal position of power or have formal authority over those in the group who choose to follow him or her.

It behooves the formal leader to quickly identify the informal leader and make sure they are working toward the attainment of the group's goals. If they are not, they can quickly lead the group astray. Work with the informal leader to achieve a unified approach. With practice you will be able to develop the appropriate approach and work together with the informal leader to attain the assigned goal(s).

The know-it-all, has an opinion on everything, sometimes it is even an informed opinion. This person wants to be paid attention to and wishes to be taken seriously. A skilled leader will channel the know-it-all's energy and provide boundaries within which the member will contribute.

The expert has the technical knowledge, experience or skills required, but sometimes does not have the communications skills to express the idea well. Seek the expert out and make sure his/her ideas get to the table. The informal leader may be employed to help with this task.

The mediator tries to build consensus. They can build common ground with expressions like "You seem to agree with ..." or "So if she agrees to ... then you will agree to..." or "We are agreed that..." The mediator helps keep the team together and prevents arguments and gets people give up their entrenched position. They take care of the group feelings. When paired with the synergizer who is focused on the task they can be a powerful pair. A synergizer

would say, "Remember, we are trying to..." or " So we will ..." or "By our next meeting I will ... and you will ..." By turning to the mediator or synergizer and asking for their help the leader can keep things on track.

The gate keeper wants to get everyone in the conversation. They are particularly valuable when there is a mix of outgoing and quiet members, or new members and veteran members, or senior and junior ranking members. They say things like, "Let's hear what ... has to say.", or "We have not heard from..." and " What do you think". They are very helpful in getting the new guy into the conversation and making them part of the group. They can also contain the know-it-all.

The leader of the group must establish the formal role of each member of the group. To be effective the role of each individual in the group must interlock with the role(s) of the other members and the groups goals. Failure to accomplish this usually leads to failure to meet the group's objectives.

Role confusion can take many forms. The most common is staff officers acting like line officer and vice-versa. To avoid this, and know the difference between line and staff officers and ask your commander/mentor/supervisor where you fit in the organization.

Consider this as well, sometimes the situation and role(s) played combine to make behavior expectations. For instance the way you speak to your spouse at home is different than how you speak when you are both at the squadron meeting. There are societal expectations such as "boys don't cry" or "all First Sergeants are in your face leaders". A good officer can play any of these roles when needed and deal with the expectations.

## **STATUS AND NORMS**

Status is one's social rank within the group. Status in CAP is not typically defined by dress, home address, outside occupation, relatives or pay. You would think awards and decorations would but they have little effect on the officers. Grade and decorations play some role, particularly the grades of colonel or general officer. These grades transcend the traditional communities within CAP, like Cadet Programs, Emergency Services, region and wing staffs, etc.

Additionally, one's status may be high in one community but low in another. For example, you may be Mr. Cadet Programs in your wing but the ES guys can't pick you out of a line up. But the great thing about CAP is to remember that no matter your title, community or grade, what seems to imbue a member with the most status in CAP is the ability to get the job done effectively, efficiently and on time.

Norms are the standards of behavior a group puts on their members. They could be the most important part of group dynamics. How does CAP impress its norms on the members? It does it with things like: uniform, regulations, core values, training, discipline, peer pressure, or even the threat of dismissal. Some norms represent positive reinforcement, some negative. The wearing of a uniform makes members feel part of a special group. Regulations attempt to ensure equity, professionalism and safety. The goal of core values speaks for itself. Training ensures interoperability, professionalism and common experience. CAP uses discipline and peer pressure in a positive way to enforce standards of professionalism and integrity.

Norms can also be defined as mutual expectations that make it possible to predict one another's behavior. Being predictable makes it easier for the member to know what is expected of them. That increases their comfort and confidence. Consequently it allows them to improve their status. Being predictable is also vital to mission accomplishment. Knowing that the Character Development Officer is going to be ready to lead their discussion on the third week of every month allows for planning and the other officers time to work. In the ES

world, being able to rely on what other people are going to do on an operational mission can be a matter of life and death.

Even at the level of a junior officer you have a responsibility to uphold and improve norms. You must not let the norm be hangar flying, missed reports and questionable ethics. You have the responsibility to yourself, your unit and CAP to continually strive for, and encourage others to strive for excellence.

### **3. Identify the causes of conflicts in a group and ways to resolve them.**

Anytime two or more people have to function together the potential for conflict arises. Conflict arises whenever two or more people choose goals or actions that are incompatible. It is an obstruction within the group. Conflict can occur in both cooperative and competitive situations.

#### **CONFLICT IN COOPERATIVE SITUATIONS**

Much conflict within a small group takes place in a cooperative environment, where everyone in the group desires to attain the same goal but each person has a different course of action as to how to reach that goal. In task oriented groups, conflict can be constructive. Conflict almost always increases the involvement level of the group members. It is not unusual for arguments within the group to result in the group eventually reaching better decisions. When a conflict is successfully resolved, it is not unusual to find an increase in the satisfaction of the members and an increase in the cohesiveness of the group. It therefore, falls to the group members to be able to quickly, respectfully and effectively resolve conflicts and guide the group members back toward attaining the assigned goal(s) of the group.

One way to cause anger and conflict in the group is for a member to fail to perform his/her role. When a member doesn't perform well (and doesn't ask for help or for another assignment) people feel like they are letting them down and must compensate for the lost member. Nobody likes to do more than their share. They see it as unfair. The underperforming member will not be accepted into the group and their status will drop. To avoid this in a line or staff situation, learn the job. Get the job description from the CAPM 20-1, and if the job has a specialty track; obtain the study guide.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is the member who tries to take someone else's role. They are seen as a usurper, trying to "move in". This is a variation on overstepping one's role or authority. It is seen as presumptuous or egotistical. It is better to ask other members to use their role to accomplish the task.

#### **CONFLICT IN COMPETITIVE SITUATIONS**

On the other hand, conflict is, by nature, competitive. Competitive situations arise when members of a group have different goals that are mutually exclusive. Some members may fight to gain control over the group's decision. Others may compete for friendship and acceptance by other members of the same group. Others may compete for status. The list goes on. What's common to dissimilar goals is that focus is shifted away from the original purpose of the group's formation. The leader must shift focus back to the group's purpose, while addressing the personal issues. This may require compromise where not everyone gets what they want. The leader must decide if the conflict's resolution is worth the compromise.

An example here would be a pilot who wants to fly. Owning a small airplane is beyond their economic reach and renting a plane is a strain on their budget. Let's say the pilot joins "for the cheap flying". They do not fulfill a duty at the squadron nor do they fly any category of mission. All they do is "proficiency fly". The pilot is annoyed at the additional training and restrictions

put on them. The unit sees them as dead weight. Conflict will arise. (This problem could have been avoided by clearer expectations during the recruiting phase of the pilot's membership.) The best solution is to get the pilot's goals and the unit's goals aligned. If the pilot can see that the added training and restrictions required to become a mission pilot or orientation pilot will lead to better flying and a feeling of accomplishment, then the organization and member have symbiotic goals. Once that is done the relationship can be expanded. If the organization and member have conflicting goals that can not be brought into alignment the two should go their separate ways.

One way to cause conflict in a competitive situation is to go outside of the chain of command. It is unprofessional, embarrassing and impedes discipline. Members who go outside of their chain of command embarrass their group, their commander, and themselves. There can be "professional" consequences as well as social consequences.

Micromanagement is potentially corrosive to the integrity of a group. Members feel it is a sign of lack of confidence in their abilities, a lack of trust. Most people want to be left alone to do their job, and can do their job well. It can be that a person who micromanages is insecure in their position or lacks confidence in their subordinate(s). It's important however to distinguish between micromanagement and healthy oversight. When a project needs adjustment the leader needs to step in. Members should communicate openly with their commanders and leaders and "walk a mile" in their leader's shoes. This communication should be about their perceptions of the group's interactions as well as the progress of the project.

## **RISK SHIFT**

Risk shift can be thought of as the tendency for a group to accept a solution or make a decision with a higher level of risk than would a single decision-maker (Napier, 1981). The key to this phenomenon is diffusion, or the perceived spreading of responsibility (and perceived risk) among the members of the group. This is dangerous in a group environment because (Senger, 1980, 176)

- The nature of the group provides protection against consequences from the decision "the group agreed," or, "I was only one vote."
- Discussion of the problem among the group (even if the quality of discussion or assumptions is poor) makes the problem seem more familiar and less challenging.
- Risk taking is valued in American culture.
- Leaders tend to be risk-takers.
- Once a risky decision is proposed and there is interest, peer pressure builds to continue down the road. This leads to what Guberman calls an "escalation of commitment," where a group will press a bad position rather than cut their losses and regroup.

There are some buzzwords and phrases that can be heard when a group is risk-shifting, such as "bending the rules," "not getting caught," "just this once," or "let's tell the boss after." In CAP it tends to happen when a group focuses so much on mission accomplishment that they believe the ends justify the means. In the end, most of the time, a poorly thought plan does more to hurt the mission than it could ever do to forward the mission.

As one can imagine, risk-shift can be a great source of conflict in a group where one or more members can see the risk inherent in a course of action but cannot persuade their fellow members to rethink their solution. Utilizing Operational Risk Management (ORM) techniques can be helpful in developing and swaying opinion. A simple, but effective question to ask is, "Would you want to see this on CNN?"

## **POOR COMMUNICATION**

Finally, poor communication is a primary reason for conflict in groups. Group members must be sensitive to how they communicate with each other, whether they listen, how they are received, as well as the quality of their message. Being an effective communicator is to be an effective listener and speaker. This will be discussed in more depth in the communications lesson of this course.

For more information on dealing with the conflict see the Conflict Management lesson of this course.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

As a junior officer you will work either as a line officer and a staff officer. Know the difference. At times you will get to work on committees. Everyone has a role in the group. Those roles will also come into play at the weekly meeting but in a less intense way. Knowing how to capitalize on those roles will make the group successful.

Each group has its structure (roles, status and norms). Coming to understand and fulfill your role, and adopting the (positive) norms of the group will increase your status. But nothing increases your status like success.

Conflict is inevitable in a group, and it can be constructive. It can bring out new and improved ideas. It is caused by many reasons, all of which can be overcome if you are observant and responsive. But failure to accomplish the important task of conflict resolution results in chaos and mayhem becoming the rule. The goal(s) and objective(s) of the group become forgotten.

### **Works Cited**

Napier, Rodney W, and Gershenfeld, Matti K., Groups, Theory and Experience, Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston, MA, 1981

Senger, John, Individuals, Groups, and the Organization, Winthrop Publishers, Inc, Cambridge, MA. 1980.