

# Roles in Groups

<http://www.abacon.com/commstudies/groups/roles.html>

Every member of a group plays a certain role within that group. Some roles relate to the task aspect of the group, while others promote social interaction. A third set of roles are self-centered and can be destructive for the group. Read about the roles group members play and then complete the activity.

## Task-Oriented Roles

Researchers Benne and Sheats<sup>1</sup> identified several roles which relate to the completion of the group's task:

- **Initiator-contributor:** Generates new ideas.
- **Information-seeker:** Asks for information about the task.
- **Opinion-seeker:** Asks for the input from the group about its values.
- **Information-giver:** Offers facts or generalization to the group.
- **Opinion-giver:** States his or her beliefs about a group issue.
- **Elaborator:** Explains ideas within the group, offers examples to clarify ideas.
- **Coordinator:** Shows the relationships between ideas.
- **Orienter:** Shifts the direction of the group's discussion.
- **Evaluator-critic:** Measures group's actions against some objective standard.
- **Energizer:** Stimulates the group to a higher level of activity.
- **Procedural-technician:** Performs logistical functions for the group.
- **Recorder:** Keeps a record of group actions.

## Social Roles

Groups also have members who play certain social roles:

- **Encourager:** Praises the ideas of others.
- **Harmonizer:** Mediates differences between group members.
- **Compromiser:** Moves group to another position that is favored by all group members.
- **Gatekeeper/expediter:** Keeps communication channels open.
- **Standard Setter:** Suggests standards or criteria for the group to achieve.
- **Group observer:** Keeps records of group activities and uses this information to offer feedback to the group.
- **Follower:** Goes along with the group and accepts the group's ideas.

## Individualistic Roles

These roles place the group member above the group and are destructive to the group.

- **Aggressor:** Attacks other group members, deflates the status of others, and other aggressive behavior.
- **Blocker:** Resists movement by the group.
- **Recognition seeker:** Calls attention to himself or herself.
- **Self-confessor:** Seeks to disclose nongroup related feelings or opinions.
- **Dominator:** Asserts control over the group by manipulating the other group members.
- **Help seeker:** Tries to gain the sympathy of the group.
- **Special interest pleader:** Uses stereotypes to assert his or her own prejudices.

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<sup>1</sup> Benne, K., and Sheats, P. (1948). *Functional roles of group members*. Journal of Social Issues, 4, 41-49. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers

# Group Roles Quiz

1. Which task role is concerned with showing the relationships between ideas?

- Opinion-seeker
- Elaborator
- Coordinator
- Recorder

2. Individual roles are beneficial to the group.

- True
- False

3. Which social role is concerned with praising the ideas of others?

- Encourager
- Harmonizer
- Compromiser
- Follower

4. Which individualistic role is concerned with gaining the sympathy of others?

- Aggressor
- Blocker
- Help Seeker
- Dominator

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1. Which task role is concerned with showing the relationships between ideas?

**Correct Answer:** Coordinator

2. Individual roles are beneficial to the group.

**Correct Answer:** False

3. Which social role is concerned with praising the ideas of others?

**Correct Answer:** Encourager

4. Which individualistic role is concerned with gaining the sympathy of others?

**Correct Answer:** Help Seeker

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