Task and Maintenance Functions in Groups

The two elementary parts of effective group operation are task roles and maintenance roles. Each role is really a set of behaviours to pay attention to in meetings and activities. Generally, task functions keep groups headed toward decisions and action. Maintenance functions help build a group's sense of identity and develop the social relationships in a group.

**TASK**

- **Initiating**: Proposing tasks and goals, defining the problems, suggesting procedures and solutions all help to give direction and purpose to a group.
- **Information seeking**: Requesting relevant facts and soliciting clarification helps groups gather information, and makes them aware of what information is needed.
- **Information giving**: Offering relevant facts, and sorting out biases and opinions from facts, helps to provide useful information.
- **Opinion seeking**: Asking for opinions or feelings on a topic can test for unity, and helps groups understand an issue more deeply.
- **Clarifying**: Defining terms, interpreting ideas, indicating issues and alternatives helps to eliminate confusion.
- **Elaborating**: Giving examples, developing meanings and explaining help reduce ambiguity and illustrate consequences of plans and positions.
- **Coordinating**: Suggesting ways to handle a problem or process can help harmonise conflicting issues, or help a group make tough choices.
- **Developing procedures**: Suggesting agendas and discussion formats helps meetings to become more efficient.
- **Summarising**: Pulling together related issues or contradictions, restating and identifying conclusions all focus discussions, and keep groups on track.

**MAINTENANCE**

- **Encouraging**: Being friendly, warm or responsive, and eliciting others' contributions all help to bring out opinions and give recognition.
- **Expressing feelings**: Expressing feelings, restating others' feelings, and getting people to label their own helps groups take risks.
- **Having fun**: Joking, breaks and games all help to diffuse tensions, allow groups to express feelings, and create a lively social setting.
- **Compromising**: Offering or accepting compromises, yielding status, or admitting error, all help to build trust and cohesion.
- **Facilitating communication**: Drawing out silent members and suggesting procedures for discussions helps keep groups open and promotes equal power.
- **Setting standards and goals**: Identifying common concerns and outlining standards for the group to achieve, helps groups to enact direction and follow progress.
- **Interpreting**: Paraphrasing often helps to explain and interpret, creating greater understanding.
- **Listening**: Actively listening to others builds trust, gathers information, and promotes mutual respect.
- **Following**: Accepting and appreciating the ideas of others, and going along with the group promotes unity.
- **Declaring success**: Noticing successes, even small ones, helps groups develop self-confidence and awareness of their power.

An effective group will pay attention to all of these functions, and to the overall balance between accomplishing things and feeling good about being together. Keeping the balance often feels like a struggle, and each group will find its own point of equilibrium. When it does, the group can be dynamic, enjoyable, effective and efficient. When a group is overloaded on either task or maintenance, people dread meetings, group cohesion is low, resistance to leadership is high, and conflicts don't get resolved easily.

**Source**: First written by Will Pipkin and Betsy Raasch----Gilman for Future Now; this version by Daniel Hunter, Training for Change 2006. [http://www.TrainingForChange.org](http://www.TrainingForChange.org)