



Why Understanding Roles Has Value

Group roles play a part in helping us understand ourselves in the context of relationships with others. Individuals may recognize themselves in more than one role. The value of being mindful of the role(s) we may play is to promote group cohesion. It creates a common language to increase group/community conversations with a focus of support and encouragement. As with any of these tools, they are meant to be utilized with an approach of curiosity, not judgment or criticism. What can you learn about yourself?

Group Member Task Roles Reviewed

*These are the roles that relate to getting the work done.
Descriptions have been shortened and can be found in full in last week's pages (Nov 2-8).*

- **Initiator/Contributor** – This role initiates discussions and move groups into new areas of exploration.
- **Information Seeker** – Requests clarification of comments in terms of their factual adequacy.
- **Information Giver** – Provides factual information to the group. Is seen as an authority on the subject and relates own experience when relevant.
- **Opinion Seeker** – Asks for clarification of the values, attitudes, and opinions of group members.
- **Opinion Giver** – Often states opinions in terms of what the group "should" do.
- **Elaborator** – Takes other people's initial ideas and builds on them.
- **Co-ordinator** – Identifies and explains the relationships between ideas.
- **Orienter** – Reviews and clarifies the group's position.
- **Evaluator/Critic** – Assesses the reasonableness of a proposal and looks at whether it is fact-based and manageable as a solution.
- **Energizer** – Concentrates the group's energy on forward movement.
- **Procedural Technician** – Facilitates group discussion by taking care of logistical concerns.
- **Recorder** – Keeps track of what goes on at each meeting.

Personal and/or Social Roles

These roles contribute to the positive functioning of the group.

- **Encourager** – Affirms, supports, and praises the efforts of fellow group members.
- **Harmonizer** – Seeks ways to reduce tension and diffuse a situation.
- **Compromiser** – Willing to yield position or meet others half way.
- **Gatekeeper/Expediter** – Regulates the flow of communication.
- **Observer/Commentator** – Provides feedback to the group about how it is functioning.
- **Follower** – Seen as a listener not a contributor.



Group Member Task Roles

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Be mindful that these roles below serve only to increase awareness of how these roles might interfere with creating a cohesive & supportive community. As noted above, **be curious** *not critical* as you understand these particular roles.

Dysfunctional and/or Individualistic Roles

These roles disrupt group progress and weaken its cohesion.

- **Aggressor** – Makes personal attacks using belittling and insulting comments.
- **Blocker** – Opposes every idea or opinion that is put forward and yet refuses to make own suggestions.
- **Recognition Seeker** – Uses group meetings to draw personal attention to him or herself.
- **Self-Confessor** – Uses the group meetings as an avenue to disclose personal feelings and issues.
- **Disrupter/Jokester** – Distracts other people by telling jokes, playing pranks, or even reading unrelated material.
- **Dominator** – Tries to control the conversation and dictate what people should be doing.
- **Help Seeker** – Actively looks for sympathy by expressing feelings of inadequacy.
- **Special Interest Pleader** – Avoids revealing his or her own biases or opinions.

Identifying Group Roles (From Kenneth Benne and Paul Sheats, 1948, "Functional Roles of Group Members", Journal of Social Issues, 4(2), pp. 41-49.)



Ask yourself . . .

1. Is there a role not mentioned that you think belongs?

2. Are you able to consider these various roles without being critical to yourself?

Try to answer this question with mindfulness and awareness of how these roles can be helpful or harmful in a support group/community.

3. How can it be helpful for you to understand these various roles within a group?