

Review of *Small group communication: Forming and sustaining teams*

Justin Walton

Professor of Communication Studies
Cameron University
justinw@cameron.edu

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Small Group Communication: Forming and Sustaining Teams is designed as an undergraduate textbook committed to furnishing students with an assortment of theories, principles, and strategies for improving group communication experiences across a variety of social domains and contexts. According to Linabary and Castro, the text was crafted to cover content in an upper division small group communication course taught at Emporia State University (Emporia, KS). While the book is configured closely in both arrangement and substance to other traditionally available group communication textbooks, it remains comparatively advantageous for an open copyright license that allows users to access the publication at no cost through multiple formats including online, e-book, or as a PDF file. A major strength of *Small Group Communication* is its ability to highlight the fundamental concepts of group communication theory (broadly considered) in plain and uncomplicated detail while interspersing useful and relatable examples that complement and reinforce the book's core content. The text is written in a highly readable, nontechnical fashion and may be used as a principal or supplementary resource in either introductory or advanced group communication classes.

The book is comprised of 16 chapters that are thematically clustered around four major divisions. The first section, “Group and Team Communication Overview,” contains a solitary chapter that lays out important group-based terminology as well as considers the central features of group communication including types of groups, group structures, and the benefits and drawbacks of group work. Sections two and three constitute the bulk of the text and center on issues that bear directly and secondarily on the formation and maintenance of groups. Chapter Two, “Understanding Group Formation,” surveys the motives underlying group membership and compares two explanatory models of group development (i.e., Tuckman’s model and punctuated equilibrium). Chapter Three, “Identifying Group Roles,” draws on Benne and Sheats’ functional role theory to frame discussions of task, maintenance, and negative group roles. Chapter Four describes the features and functions of group norms and offers instructive advice for addressing destructive normative behaviors. Chapter Five, “Working in Diverse Teams,” delivers a pragmatic, albeit superficial, primer in cultural diversity while Chapter Six addresses the bases, sources, and tactics of power in group contexts.

The largest part of the textbook, section three, examines group processes and methods of decision-making/problem-solving. Chapter Seven highlights elements of group climate and features a concise, but apt, synopsis of Bormann’s symbolic convergence theory. Chapter Eight, “Navigating Group Conflict,” deals with forms of functional and dysfunctional conflict, with matters ranging from the productive dynamics of group conflict to consideration of individual conflict management styles. Most useful are the strategies presented for conflict prevention and reduction. Chapter Nine concentrates exclusively on the topic of social loafing. What is unique about this emphasis, particularly in the comparative context of other group communication textbooks, is the specialized and self-contained treatment the authors offer the subject with

regard to the causes and effects of social loafing, cultural and gender-based variations of loafing, and ways of addressing reduced individual effort. The chapter encourages readers to reflect on the consequences of diminished effort in a way that is both thought-provoking and applied. Chapter Ten includes relevant discussions about groupthink, consensus making, and decision-making methods, while Chapter Eleven draws upon John Dewey's reflective thinking framework to put forth a well-known group problem-solving model that incorporates problem definition, analysis, generating and selecting solutions, and implementation planning. Chapters Twelve and Thirteen familiarize readers with the principles of effective leadership and compare conventional models of group leadership: designated and emergent leadership, trait versus situational approaches, and situational (i.e., Hersey-Blanchard model, path-goal theory) and transformative leadership styles.

The final section, "Putting Group Communication Skills into Practice," focuses on practical guidelines and communicative applications for managing group meetings, facilitating creativity sessions, and planning and conducting public presentations. In Chapter Fourteen, the authors give concrete direction for meeting preparation (e.g., time, place, manner, forming an agenda) and offer time tested tactics for supporting group meetings and deliberations; sensible tips for employing technology and taking part in virtual meetings are also addressed. Chapter Fifteen, "Enhancing Creativity in Groups," surveys creativity in generous depth and synthesizes numerous methods for facilitating brainstorming sessions which teachers and students should find valuable as any or all of them could be modified for classroom demonstration and instruction. The concluding chapter, "Presenting as a Group," is a primer in the principles of public speaking; the authors succinctly review types of group presentations, approaches for organizing content, speech outlining, audience analysis, and verbal and nonverbal delivery.

Students inexperienced in public speaking will find the material instructive and convenient, especially if oral presentations and/or group discussions are required components of the course.

Two short appendices tackle the subjects of professional communication (e.g., writing emails, formatting memos, netiquette) and APA style. Having taught business communication and research methods over the years, I can appreciate the pedagogical importance of this supplemental material and find merit in its inclusion here.

All chapters begin with clear and concise learning objectives and close with three to five “review and reflection questions” which could be assigned independently or utilized for classroom conversation. Figures, images, and tables are sprinkled strategically throughout the text and help readers by inserting attractive visual features into the expository content. Important vocabulary words are highlighted with mouse-over text that allows readers to define new or unfamiliar terminology as they study without interrupting the flow of reading. There are references at the end of each chapter and a full glossary of vocabulary terms at the end of the textbook.

By all appearances and manifest intent by the authors, the textbook is geared toward use in lower-level group communication courses (either online or traditional), but could easily be incorporated as a supplementary resource across a wide range of classes and disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology, human relations). Although Linabary and Castro do not provide much in the way of original or inventive content, they do a respectable job of streamlining traditional group communication scholarship and balancing it with functional and applied examples, best practices, etc. Given the open access nature of the text, the book could be used in myriad applications. Individual chapters could stand on their own and serve as a useful pedagogical resource for instructors interested in specific topics or cross-curricular subjects. Hyperlinks to the

material could also be shared in ways conducive with varying learning modalities and instructional delivery methods.

In closing, *Small Group Communication: Forming and Sustaining Teams* is an intelligent, flexible substitute to traditionally-published group communication textbooks that can be freely accessed by students, teachers, and, of course, the public at large. While the book's lack of ancillary aids may be a hurdle for new or adjunct instructors, it more than makes up for it in its concise writing and clear organizational structure. I would have no reservations about using or recommending the book as either a primary or secondary text for an undergraduate group communication course. Indeed, the authors are to be congratulated for their unique contribution to group communication curricula.