

# Preface

The 11th edition was written to help students become more effective small group members and leaders by giving them the research-based tools—both in terms of theoretical understandings and practical suggestions—for effective participation in groups. With these tools, people can understand why one group is satisfying and, perhaps, why another feels like torture. More important, they will understand what they can *do* about it.

*Effective Group Discussion* focuses on secondary groups, such as work groups, committees, task forces, self-directed work teams, and other small groups with tasks to complete. The text is written for academically prepared beginning students of small group communication and is likely to be most useful to upper-division students who can appreciate the extensive research base that grounds the narrative. It also serves well as a reference source for advanced communication students, consultants, or group leaders.

## Overview

Generally, the chapters move the discussion from systems inputs to throughput processes to outcomes. However, after Chapters 1 and 2, the text is designed so instructors have the flexibility to skim or skip chapters or cover them in a different order. For instance, we offer a section that covers basic communication theory for students without a previous course in communication, but this section can be skimmed quickly if it reviews material students already know.

Part I presents an overview of small group theory. Chapter 1 introduces several ideas that are developed in subsequent chapters: the importance of small groups in our lives, types of groups, why diversity is important, and how technology can help a group. Chapter 2 introduces the organizing framework of systems theory.

Part II, “The Foundations of Communicating in Groups,” presents a theoretical description of the communication process, placing *communication* at the center of a group’s throughput processes. If it is a review for some students, it can be skimmed. Chapter 3 explains the communication process, Chapter 4 concentrates on verbal and nonverbal signals, and Chapter 5 describes the effects of culture and cultural differences on communication in small groups.

Part III focuses on the development of the group as an entity. Chapter 6 discusses the members. Chapters 7 and 8 deal with how members develop from a collection of individuals into a group, with Chapter 7 focusing on structuration and the development of roles and norms, and Chapter 8 on networks, status relationships, cohesiveness, avoiding groupthink, teambuilding, and SYMLOG. Chapter 9 presents theoretical perspectives about leadership, and Chapter 10 offers guidelines for designated small group leaders.

Part IV links throughput processes with outputs as it presents information about effective problem solving. It begins with an overview of problem solving in Chapter 11, moves to a discussion of decision making in Chapter 12, and concludes in Chapter 13 with information about how properly managed conflict can enhance these important small group processes.

Part V contains techniques and tools for evaluating and improving small groups. Chapter 14 presents specific discussion techniques that maximize small group effectiveness. Techniques and tools for observing, analyzing, and evaluating small group communication are presented in Chapter 15.

Finally, the appendices contain information that is important to some instructors but that others do not use. Appendix A covers information about how to make public presentations of a group's work and Appendix B describes the information gathering process group members should use.

When compared to our other small group text, *Communicating in Groups, Effective Group Discussion* includes more current research, uses a more extensive vocabulary, and places greater emphasis on connecting application directly to theoretical principles and models. Visual illustrations are incorporated to depict and teach rather than to entertain or capture attention. Students will find their needs for research summaries and theoretical explanations well met. Intersecting with these strong academic underpinnings are numerous practical suggestions for participating effectively in small groups.

Systems theory is the theoretical foundation on which *Effective Group Discussion* is based. We believe it provides the most useful, accessible framework for incorporating all that we know about small groups. We discuss the other major theories that bear on small group discussion, such as structuration, symbolic convergence, and so forth, but systems theory serves to organize what we present in the text and to remind readers of the interdependent relationships among *all* the components of small groups.

### Changes to the 11th Edition

This 11th edition of *Effective Group Discussion* extends a series of the changes that was started with the 10th edition. Gloria Galanes and Kathy Adams have assumed primary responsibility for the text, with Jack Brillhart serving as a consultant. For all of us, small group work is too important to be left to chance or conventional wisdom. Thus, the new edition continues to provide a comprehensive survey and interpretation of the small group research literature, accompanied by practical, prescriptive guidance that readers have come to expect of this text.

We pride ourselves on providing a solid research base for readers. As we update each edition with the most current research available, our challenge has always been what to leave out. In this edition, to accommodate increased coverage of technology and diversity, we have streamlined certain sections and removed tangential information. We believe diversity is a critical issue for groups; to emphasize this, we have retained the chapter on intercultural communication, but we have also placed information about group diversity throughout the text. In addition, we have expanded our coverage of technology and groups by including such coverage, where relevant, throughout the text. We have expanded the discussion of structuration theory, to include information about adaptive structuration theory. We have added information about socialization of members into groups, generational differences, and the effects of poor diversity management. We have moved the groupthink section to the decision-making chapter and linked it more closely to decision processes. We also include quotes throughout the text from individuals identified by their peers as being excellent leaders. These quotes came from extensive interviews Gloria completed last year and underscore the messages in the text. Finally, we continue to use examples from our own lives, from media reports, and from stories our students and colleagues have shared with us.

## Features

**Case Studies:** Each chapter begins with a case study that illustrates main points from the chapter. These are usually real-life stories that serve to help students retain key content and understand the relevance and application of the chapter's topic.

**Consider This Boxes:** *Consider This* boxes ask the students to apply a concept explicated in the chapter. This feature is designed to help students think more deeply about a concept by asking them to apply it. This not only helps students learn the material but also encourages them to understand how the information is useful in everyday small group situations. *Consider This* boxes can be used to prompt class discussion.

**Leader Quotes:** Each chapter includes quotes relevant to the chapter's topics. These quotes are taken from interviews with individuals who have been identified by their peers as being excellent leaders, and they reinforce the importance of the topic.

**Emphasis on Technology:** There are many ways in which technology can be used by groups, and we are just beginning to learn how technology affects group interaction. This information is distributed throughout the text.

**Emphasis on Diversity:** The importance of diversity and intercultural communication cannot be overemphasized! In addition to a chapter

devoted to this topic, relevant information about diversity is distributed throughout the text.

**Tables and Figures:** Tables and figures are provided to illustrate concepts in the text. They offer a concise, visual summary of information explicated in the text. Several new tables and figures are included in this edition.

**Learning Aids:** Each chapter includes learning objectives for the chapter; a list of key terms, which are boldface in the text; a chapter summary highlighting the chapter's main points; and exercises that apply the information. The bibliography that accompanies each chapter provides additional reading material should instructors or students wish to pursue chapter information in more depth. The glossary at the end of the text provides definitions of all key terms.

**Online Learning Center and Small Group Supersite**

([www.mbhe.com](http://www.mbhe.com) and [www.mbhe.com/smallgroups](http://www.mbhe.com/smallgroups)): McGraw-Hill provides online learning for students that supplements topics in the chapter. An icon at the end of each chapter guides students to relevant tools and activities including interactive quizzes, glossary flashcards, and weblinks.

## Resources for Instructors

**Instructor's Manual:** The manual provides sample syllabi, sample lecture notes, additional exercises, writing assignments, "writing to learn" assignments, suggestions for relevant videos and films that illustrate chapter contents, and a test bank of objective and essay questions to help the instructor.

**Videos:** Two videos are available with the text. *Communicating Effectively in Small Groups* offers four scenarios that lend themselves to extended analysis. Each scenario focuses on a specific small group topic: leadership, conflict, effective problem solving, and ineffective problem solving. *Communicating in Groups: Short Takes* provides 24 short scenes, each depicting a specific concept discussed in the text.

**Websites:** The *Online Learning Center* and the *Small Group Website* offer book-specific exercises, quizzes, supplemental content, and up-to-date links to sites with interesting information for both students and instructors.

Gloria J. Galanes  
Katherine Adams  
John K. Brillhart