Chapter 7: Social Influence and Group Processes

Review Questions — Review Questions

Q1 Compare and contrast formal and informal groups, and ingroups and outgroups.

Formal and informal groups differ in how explicitly their functions are stated and in structure. A formal group, such as a university or an office organisation, is formed on specific rules or laws, its functions are stated explicitly, members have definite roles, and a set of norms maintains order. An informal group is not based on rules or laws; it forms through close relationships among members, as in a circle of friends.

Ingroups and outgroups differ in how we categorise people. The ingroup is one's own group, referred to as "we"; the outgroup is another group, referred to as "they". Ingroup members are generally seen as similar, viewed favourably and credited with desirable traits, while outgroup members are viewed differently and often negatively. Tajfel's minimal group experiments showed that even groups created on a flimsy basis, like preference for a painter, led children to favour their own group.

The common point is that all four are ways of classifying groups: the first pair by structure, the second by membership and perception.

Q2 Are you a member of a certain group? Discuss what motivated you to join that group.

Yes. I am a member of my school's cricket team, a secondary group because I joined it by choice, unlike my family, which is a primary group I was born into. Several reasons from the chapter explain why I joined.

First, proximity and similarity: I play in the same ground as my classmates, and our shared love of cricket made us friends. Second, common motives and goals: winning inter-school matches is something none of us can achieve alone. Third, psychological needs: the team gives me a sense of belongingness and security, since being with others reduces insecurity. Fourth, status and self-esteem: when our school wins, I feel recognised and proud, and membership in a well-regarded team enhances my self-concept. Finally, the team supplies knowledge, as seniors share techniques and information I would not have on my own.

(Personal answer; a student may name any group, such as a music club or a study group, and explain it using these motives.)

Q3 How does Tuckman's stage model help you to understand the formation of groups?

Tuckman's model shows that a group is not formed the moment people come together; it develops through five stages, which helps us understand why new groups feel uncertain, conflicted and then settled.

1. Forming: members first meet, are uncertain about the group, its goal and how to achieve it, and assess whether they will fit in. There is excitement as well as apprehension.
2. Storming: intragroup conflict arises about how to reach the target, who controls the group and its resources, and who performs which task. Once it is resolved, a leadership hierarchy and clear vision emerge.
3. Norming: members develop norms for group behaviour, leading to a positive group identity.
4. Performing: the structure has evolved and is accepted, and the group moves towards its goal. For some groups this is the last stage.
5. Adjourning: once the purpose is over, as with an organising committee for a school function, the group may disband.

The model is not rigid: stages may overlap, be skipped, or the group may go back and forth between them.

Q4 How do groups influence our behaviour?

Groups are powerful because they influence the behaviour of individuals, mainly through the presence of others and through shared structure.

Social facilitation: when we perform an activity alone but in the presence of others, their presence causes arousal. This motivates us to perform better if we are already good at the task, provided our efforts are individually evaluated.

Social loafing: when we work with others on a collective task where efforts are pooled, we often put in less effort than when working alone. In the tug-of-war example, no one can tell how much force each member exerts, so some become free riders. Latane's experiments showed that as group size grew, total noise rose but each person's noise fell.

Group structure also shapes behaviour: roles set expected behaviour, norms act as unspoken rules, status brings prestige, and cohesiveness makes members think and act as a social unit. Groups can also affect decisions, as in groupthink, where the wish for unanimity overrides realistic appraisal of options.

Q5 How can you reduce social loafing in groups? Think of any two incidents of social loafing in school. How did you overcome it?

Social loafing is a reduction in individual effort when working on a collective task whose outputs are pooled. According to the chapter, it can be reduced by:
- making the efforts of each person identifiable;
- increasing the pressure to work hard, by making members committed to successful performance;
- increasing the apparent importance or value of the task;
- making people feel their individual contribution is important;
- strengthening group cohesiveness, which raises motivation for a successful group outcome.

Model incidents (personal answers may differ):
1. In a group science project, a few members left the work to the others because the final submission carried only one group mark. We overcame it by dividing the project into parts, writing each member's name against a part, and having each person present their own part.
2. In a class tug-of-war or relay practice, some students pulled lightly since no one could see individual effort. We fixed it by explaining that the match result mattered to the whole school, making each person's role specific, and building team spirit before the contest.