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# Leadership as Group Regulation

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Groups often fail to successfully regulate all of the competing tensions they experience. Past research suggests, for example, that groups often misregulate these tensions by focusing on one force to the exclusion of others (e.g., focusing exclusively on consensus leads to groupthink). Relatively little research attention has been paid, however, to how groups manage the natural tensions in their lives, such as the trade-offs between efficiency and effectiveness, task and relationship, etc.—with virtually no attention at all focused on any potential role for leaders in helping groups balance these tensions. This chapter addresses this gap in the literature by proposing that effective groups have leaders who play a critical role in the regulation of these tensions. We use self-regulation theory to derive hypotheses about what makes leaders effective, including, (a) promoting self-awareness among group members, (b) setting clear standards and goals for the group, and (c) motivating group members to reduce the discrepancy between the goals and the current performance of the group. We end the chapter by developing a number of novel hypotheses that derive from this theoretical perspective.

It is natural and inevitable that work groups experience tensions in coordinating the interaction of their members (e.g., Arrow, McGrath, & Berdahl, 2000; Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Smith & Berg, 1987). One of the classic trade-offs in group life, for example, is the tension between task and relationship focus (e.g., Blake & Mouton, 1964; Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954). Does the group prefer harmonious relations or the absolute highest quality decisions? How any group handles this type of trade-off has profound implications for the relative success or failure of that group. If a group strongly prefers harmonious relations, for example, this is likely to reduce the chances of group members challenging one another intellectually due to the risk of offending those who are challenged. The overly cooperative atmosphere in the group may not allow minority dissent to be voiced, discouraging the group from thinking creatively or divergently (cf. Nemeth, 1986). Thus, a strong relationship focus increases the likelihood that the group will not rigorously process all task information available to it. Irving Janis' (1982) groupthink phenomenon is a classic example of regulating for relationships to the exclusion of quality of the task at hand. In his book *Victims of Groupthink,* Janis (1982) argued that extreme pressures for unanimity can build in a cohesive group that confronts serious threat (high stress) and lacks norms of deliberative decision making. These pressures cause decision makers to censor any misgivings they may have, ignore outside information, and overestimate the group's chances of success. Groupthink is a failure to appropriately regulate group tensions—a recipe for poor quality decisions and an open invitation to disaster.

The tension between task and relationship focus is one of many trade-offs that groups face continually. Other tensions inherent in group life include the trade-offs between efficiency and effectiveness (e.g., how much time to spend on a problem), the mix of cooperation and competition among members (e.g., working together or independently), group versus individual identity (e.g., a single common goal or multiple compatible goals), how open or closed the group should be to the outside world (e.g., the amount of external information used in decision making), and how much to emphasize change versus stability. Although relatively little research attention has been paid to how groups manage these tensions (for exceptions see Altman, Vinsel, & Brown, 1981; Smith & Berg, 1987), virtually no energy has been focused on the role of leaders in helping the group to balance these tensions. This chapter addresses this gap in the literature by proposing that effective leadership is about helping a group maintain an appropriate balance across these various tensions. We use self-regulation theory, also known as control theory, as the basis of our analysis, arguing that regulation of group tensions is analogous to how individuals self-regulate the natural tensions in their lives—and is essential to successful group performance and decision making.



## UNDERSTANDING GROUPS AS SELF-REGULATING SYSTEMS

While the self-regulation perspective is most commonly applied to individual behavior, we also propose it here as a useful framework for explaining the relationship between naturally occurring group tensions, group performance, and the role of leadership in groups. Here we present it as a mid-range theory that recognizes groups as adaptive and self-organizing systems (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Vancouver, 2000). We argue that groups operate in a system of tensions that effects their performance—including the interaction and processes within their boundaries as well as feedback and events beyond their boundaries within the larger organization (Arrow et al., 2000; Karoly, 1993; McGrath, 1991). As applied to groups, the self-regulation perspective recognizes that groups are able to adapt and reorganize work practices in response to multiple system tensions by maintaining awareness of the trade-offs they make around these tensions. This process includes, (a) receiving task or goal assignments from the external organization, (b) interacting internally to coordinate their resources to best accomplish these assigned tasks or goals, and (c) using external feedback during the course of task completion to adapt work practices and reduce any discrepancy between their goal progress and the desired goal (Carver & Scheier, 2000).

This cycle of receiving feedback to assess current goal achievement and then modifying behavior accordingly is analogous to the psychological process of self-regulation in individuals. Here we call it *group regulation.* The word "group" is added to the word "regulation" because it assumes that the ability to adapt and re-organize comes from within the group system itself, rather than from any external source (cf. Vancouver, 1996). Group regulation means that the ability to adapt and respond to external feedback comes from refocusing internal activity. In other words, responding to external feedback requires an awareness of how internal tensions are focusing (or biasing) group activity, of any discrepancy between current group progress toward the desired goal and external expectations, and of any changes to group activity necessary to accomplish that goal. Figure 7.1 shows this process. The main difference between individual

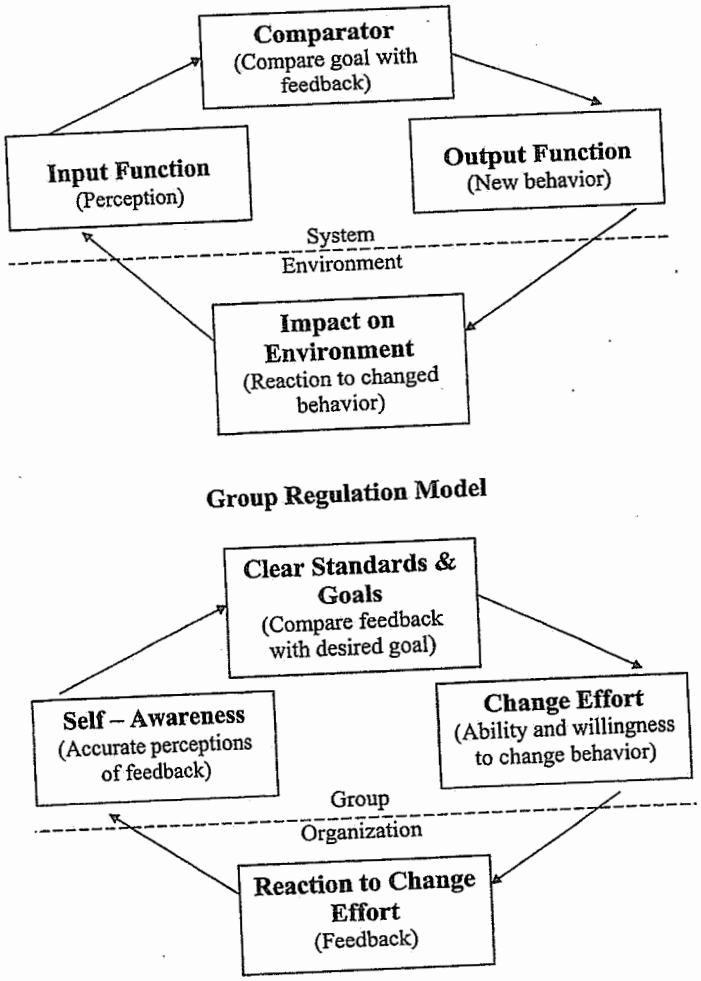


FIG. 7.1. Self-regulation model (derived from Carver & Scheier, 1982).

self-regulation and group self-regulation is that group regulation is more complex, as it requires balancing competing motives and interests of multiple individuals. This becomes especially difficult if groups are juggling multiple goals simultaneously, if goals change or become muddied in response to external pressures, or if resources available to achieve those goals increase or decrease—all circumstances that aggravate naturally occurring and competing group tensions.

The literature on individual self-regulation suggests three necessary conditions for successful group regulation (i.e., explaining superior group



performance). Failure to uphold these three conditions constitutes a self-regulation failure where groups, (a) fall off of their "balance beam" of competing tensions, (b) experience declining performance, and (c) need team leader intervention.

The first condition is self-awareness. This is probably the most difficult condition of the regulation process for groups to satisfy because problems often remain concealed to group members, as over-regulating to one side of a tension can produce symptoms that are not easily linkable to their original source (Moreland & Levine, 1992). For example, an initial conflict about a task-related issue might spiral into a personality or relationship conflict (see Simons & Peterson, 2000; Wall & Callister, 1995). If the group then reacts by focusing on relationship issues, they will miss the more fundamental problem of underlying differences that caused the original task conflict (e.g., differences in values and approaches to the problem at hand). These tendencies, identified by Argyris (1985) as defensive routines, are often self-reinforcing, but are not necessarily self-correcting. This makes them difficult to be aware of and change if they persist over time because they become part of the operating norms of the group. These routines enable groups to avoid painful conflict, but can significantly limit the group's awareness of its actions and flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. As a result, groups often become self-aware only through the benefit of hindsight after a decision-making failure. While hindsight may help those who follow, these failures can be very costly to the group that commits them.

The second necessary condition for regulation success is clear standards and goals. Teams are designed and created by organizations in order to meet specific goals or accomplish particular tasks. Clear goals are necessary because feedback on clear goals (as opposed to ambiguous goals) gives more precise direction to groups on how well they are making progress in achieving their assigned objective (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). When feedback is clear and concise, it also gives groups more information on how successful they are at balancing their group tensions. For example, if the group has missed an important interim deadline, that is critical information suggesting that they are overemphasizing effectiveness at the expense of efficiency. Goal clarity is especially important for success in situations where natural competing group tensions are likely to increase—such as with complex or difficult goals, when the group is working toward multiple goals simultaneously, or in an environment of scarce resources (Austin & Vancouver, 1996; Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981).

The third necessary condition for regulation success is the ability and willingness to make changes. This requires not only that the group be aware of the need for change (i.e., the two other necessary conditions), but also that it have the necessary resources to make the change (e.g., cognitive, affective, financial, etc.). Group members may understand that something *should* be changed, but may not believe it *can* be changed because they lack the necessary resources or do not want to confront painful conflict (Smith & Berg, 1987). In order for a change effort to be initiated, the group must also agree, (a) that there are alternative solutions, (b) that the change is an important one to make, and (c) how to coordinate existing resources (Moreland & Levine, 1992; Steiner, 1972; Zander, 1968).

These three necessary conditions for group regulation success are interdependent and cumulative. Goals and feedback cannot stand alone—they must give a reference point to each other in order to increase awareness and generate willingness to correct a goal shortfall or discrepancy (Arrow et al., 2000; Campion & Lord, 1982; Locke et al., 1981). If done successfully, the ability to recognize problems or goal discrepancies is motivating to a team in and of itself (Campion & Lord, 1982). If the group feels it can attain a goal and is aware of the any current discrepancies it has from that goal, group members will be more willing to try to achieve the goal. This kind of awareness also gives individual group members an indication of whether or not delaying immediate gratification of their own motives or needs as an investment in the group's future will be beneficial (Baumeister, 1998). Such beliefs about the likelihood of group success are also known as *collective efficacy* (Bandura, 1986; Whyte, 1998), which has been linked with a positive impact on performance (e.g., Lindsley, Brass, & Thomas, 1995). Groups that experience success and high performance tend to attribute that success to their own ability (Zander, 1968) and continue to be motivated by such challenges (Locke et al., 1981). While collective efficacy is generally positive, it must be balanced with healthy self-awareness. If groups develop a self-serving bias they may become less aware of negative feedback or might escalate their commitment to bad decisions (Riess, Rosenfeld, Melbury, & Tedeschi, 1981; Staw & Ross, 1987; Whyte & Peterson, 2001).

While successful self-regulation can produce positive performance spirals, unsuccessful self-regulation generally produces negative performance spirals by leading groups to over-regulate to one side of group tensions (i.e., creating ineffective process routines; cf. Lindsley et al., 1995). For example, if a group experiences repeated failures at correcting problems, regulation theory suggests that the group is likely to make efforts to



reduce goal difficulty (Campion & Lord, 1982), to change its mind about the importance of the goal, or to attribute the failure to other forces outside of their control (e.g. develop a defensive routine; Zander, 1968). Unclear goals or goals without strong group commitment will lead to more individual-oriented behaviors than group-oriented behaviors (Horwitz, 1968). This in turn creates a more competitive than cooperative group orientation (Deutsch, 1968), decreasing awareness about the group's accomplishments as a whole. For example, if group members are overly competitive with one another, this may encourage individuals to withhold important information for personal advantage, making it impossible for the group to uncover unique sources of knowledge held by individuals that other members are not aware of (cf. Stasser, Stewart, & Wittenbaum, 1995). In addition, if goals and standards are not clear and the group repeatedly receives ambiguous feedback that indicates the need for change, the group is likely to experience negative outcomes and develop evaluation apprehension (Allport, 1954). In other words, if a group routinely experiences ambiguous negative feedback and/or fails to reach its goals, the group is likely to be unclear as to which paths lead to success and decrease its motivation to make changes because members think they will not benefit and will get it wrong anyway. This creates a self-reinforcing downward spiral that decreases the chances a group will be able to successfully or objectively regulate their activities in the future.

## In Summary

Successful group regulation is, of course, more complex than individual self-regulation because groups face a variety of unique internal conflicts and competing tensions. Groups consist of multiple individuals with differing perspectives, expectations, goals, needs, wants, and motivations (Homans, 1950; Wall & Nolan, 1986). Differences in individual preferences can lead to conflict over how to manage, or even recognize, competing group tensions. This creates a "balance beam" challenge for groups to stop themselves from either over-regulating on one side (e.g., groupthink & polarization) or ignoring the tension and creating process routines that work around the tensions. Conflict over how to manage group tensions is likely to decrease a group's ability to accurately interpret discrepancies between current performance and desired goals by increasing stress and reducing the cognitive capacity of individual members as they focus their attention on internal tensions rather than on important performance cues from external feedback (cf. Evan, 1965; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). If

individual group members are not able to recognize goal-performance discrepancies, they will be unable to successfully incorporate feedback to revise work practices and will ultimately fail. Thus, performance failures come from the inability of the group to satisfy the three conditions of successful self-regulation as illustrated in Fig. 7.1.

## LEADERSHIP AS FACILITATING GROUP REGULATION

Adopting a self-regulation perspective has a number of implications as a theoretical framework for the successful leadership of groups. First and foremost, this perspective outlines three broad strategies for leadership success that are each necessary but not sufficient in helping groups avoid regulatory failures: (a) promote self-awareness among group members, (b) set clear standards and goals for the group, and (c) motivate group members to make necessary change (cf. Carver & Scheier, 1982; Vancouver, 2000). While these are common themes in many existing leadership models, the group regulation perspective is able to incorporate competing explanations for success into a single model (e.g., goal setting vs. leadership style) by adopting a more dynamic systems approach. This approach is also able to incorporate internal and external forces that shape how leaders and groups interact, as well as different group designs and varying degrees of group autonomy into a single model. By directly addressing and recognizing competing tensions that can predispose a group to long-term failure, the group regulation perspective allows for a variety of leadership qualities and strategies that can be used to satisfy the three tenets of successful group regulation. In order to demonstrate how our group regulation perspective fits within the larger group dynamics and leadership literature, we draw guidance on successful tactics for accomplishing each of these tenets from the existing groups and leadership literature.

### Promote Self-Awareness Among Group Members

In order to remain self-aware, groups must both monitor their internal process as well as incorporate feedback from the external organization into their work practices. We identify from the existing literature at least three ways in which leaders can accomplish this. The first way in which leaders raise self-awareness is to actively manage the flow of information within the group itself. This can be done by providing direct and private feedback



to individual members about how well they are living up to their prescribed group roles and responsibilities in the form of praise, regular performance reviews, or performance rewards (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 1998). Leaders can also help to balance competing tensions by structuring meetings or discussions to ensure adequate, but not excessive, opportunities for voice or discussion of issues in the group. Opportunity for voice by all encourages creative or divergent thinking (Nemeth, 1986, 1992), promotes members sharing task-related information that has not already been discussed in a meeting (such as comparisons to past experiences or unique knowledge; Stasser, 1992), and stimulates members to foresee the consequences of what each of their alternatives might be (Hirokawa, 1988; Tubbs, 1998). Excess opportunities for voice (e.g., consensus decision rules) should be avoided, however, as it can lead to poor decision quality and inefficient use of time (Peterson, 1999). Finally, leaders may also promote awareness by inviting multiple subgroups to work on the same problem simultaneously and then compare outcomes, by bringing in outsiders/experts to evaluate and challenge preliminary group solutions, and by assigning at least one group member the role of devil's advocate (Herek, Janis, & Huth, 1987; Janis, 1982, 1989).

The second way in which leaders can promote self-awareness is to actively manage the flow and timing of information coming in from outside the group (e.g., the tension of how open or closed the group should be to the outside world). Groups usually have natural and recognized boundaries between themselves and the external environment, such as assigned membership and their purpose or task (Pasmore, Francis, & Haldeman, 1982). Successful groups need to be open to outside influences because they are reliant on the larger organizational environment in which they are embedded for deadlines, task assignments, and social recognition. There is a balance to strike with openness, however. Groups can become undifferentiated or overdifferentiated with the environment to the point that their unique task and purpose becomes unclear (Arrow et al., 2000). A leader can promote self-awareness by helping groups recognize how their external information-gathering strategies are inhibiting or helping them to accomplish their task. Ancona and Caldwell (1992) suggest that groups can get caught in negative external communication patterns that detract from the group accomplishing its task. They found, for example, that groups that engaged in external information-scouting activities throughout the entire cycle of task completion underperformed groups that engaged instead in activities such as helping the group coordinate resources with other departments to meet deadlines and representing their efforts to senior

management (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992). A leader can help groups recognize when and what strategies are appropriate to the group's goal.

Another tactic leaders can use to promote self-awareness is to invite new people into the team who have important perspectives to add or, alternatively, to extend the invitation just for a meeting or two where their expertise is needed (George, 1980; Janis, 1982, 1989). Previous research suggests that an appropriate time for promoting self-awareness of goal clarity and the effectiveness of group procedures is at the mid-point of a group's task cycle because the pressure of deadlines encourages openness to alternatives (Gersick, 1988). In this way, the leader promotes self-awareness by encouraging self-discovery at the moment the group is most open to it.

The third way in which leaders raise self-awareness is to play a linking-pin role (Yukl, 1998) by bringing unique resources and information into the group discussion (Ancona, 1990). Past research has shown that leaders are well positioned to help groups do this because they are high status people with access to unique information; and as a result are often better able to identify problems than other group members because they are more in touch with what is happening outside of the group (Ridgeway, 1984). This role is reinforced because leaders are often held accountable for their group's performance (Moreland & Levine, 1992). Existing research has identified a number of ways in which leaders can put their unique information to work for the benefit of their groups. First, leaders can encourage self-awareness by providing the group with relevant inputs (advice, resources) to help the group examine whether changing their work practices and strategies will reduce the goal discrepancy, or whether the group needs to examine the deeper underlying reasoning behind the discrepancies (Argyris, 1977, 1994; Campion & Lord, 1982). For example, if the group encounters an individual who obstructs their work, the team leader may be in the best or most objective position to know whether the underlying problem is actually that individual, the culture of the organization, or the politics behind what the group is trying to accomplish.

Also in this role, leaders can use their access to external information to the group's advantage both within the group and in the broader external environment. Within the group they can promote self-awareness by (a) providing information about strategies or resources that similar groups are using, (b) helping the group forecast how their activities and efforts can stay in sync with how current organizational priorities are evolving, (c) assisting the group with understanding what the priorities might be in the future, and (d) providing information on how to interpret and understand how the group's tasks fit within broader organizational goals (Yukl, 1998; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). Leaders can promote awareness in the broader organizational context by (a) specifically advocating for the team (with upper management or other organizational groups), (b) helping to gather information about confusing or vague organizational policies or goals, (c) identifying underlying structures in the organization that are important for the group to work within or to ignore, and (d) helping filter the environmental noise from the group-relevant information coming from outside (Ancona, 1990; Cummings, 1978; Gladstein, 1984; Senge, 1990).



## Set Clear Standards and Goals for the Group

Clear standards and goals have long been considered a bedrock ingredient for effective leadership. Clear goals are important because they are the comparator by which the group benchmarks its efforts and interprets feedback. A number of scholars have identified clear goals as key to helping any group create strong group norms of success, high collective efficacy, and ultimately positive performance spirals (Locke & Latham, 1990). If each group member is able to understand the group goal and recognize how his or her individual contribution toward that goal is of value in the group, that individual will be motivated to achieve their part of the group goal (Campion & Lord, 1982), the group will create a cooperative orientation, and is likely to perform better (Deutsch, 1949).

The existing literature also suggests a number of tactics for structuring decision-making processes and helping groups establish clear standards and goals. First, Hirokawa's (1985, 1988) early work shows that groups that take the time to go through goal planning and clarification *before* they begin discussion of the problem itself are more effective problem solvers, regardless of the work method later used. He also finds that determining the minimal characteristics any alternative must possess to be acceptable helps to clarify goals and standards before the group begins its work, and thus improves group performance (Gouran & Hirokawa, 1986, 1996). Similarly, Janis (1982; Herek et al., 1987) suggests that encouraging groups to survey the range of objectives they wish to achieve before they discuss a problem improves group decision quality. In short, by structuring decision-making processes and helping a group to reconcile changing external goal expectations and internal goal interpretations, the leader can help to reduce competing tensions among individual members about how to interpret and focus group activity.

A systems view of goal setting also maintains that a group will face multiple goals at any given time—and that those goals may change or

fluctuate depending on other system influences (Campion & Lord, 1982; Locke et al., 1981). Therefore, leaders can play an important role in clarifying external expectations by helping groups gain an understanding of how their goals are distinct from and complementary to each other and broader organizational goals (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992). Specific leader behaviors outlined in the literature include, (a) facilitating alignment of personal, group, and organizational goals, (b) elucidating how group resources relate to organizational goals, and (c) providing timelines and standards for measuring achievement (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 1998).

## Motivate Group Members to Make Necessary Change

Once a group is aware of where it currently stands and is clear on its goals, the next step is to motivate group members to make the necessary changes to bring goals in line with current practice (i.e., in self-regulation terms, take action to reduce the discrepancy between goals and current performance). We identify two interdependent strategies from the existing literature by which leaders can do this. The first is by working to secure the necessary external resources for the group to succeed. Leaders should identify and seek to remedy any resource limitations or "ceiling effects" placed on the group by a lack of resources, both mechanical (e.g., old machinery, lack of technology, etc.; Goodman, Devadas, & Griffity-Hughson, 1988) as well as human (e.g., a lack of necessary skills and training; Benne & Sheats, 1948). Resource gathering is critical because fewer internal resource conflicts will help the group stay focused on the actual task (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The leader can also increase the group's motivation to make changes by acting on its behalf in the external environment. For example, the leader can advocate for the group in the external environment to reinforce group's visibility and viability with upper management and other groups (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Manz & Sims, 1987). Visibility in the larger organizational system may make it easier to secure resources, for the group itself to monitor its boundaries (if more people know about the group's activities then there are more sources of feedback available), and therefore for the group to be self-aware and motivated (Cummings, 1978; Howell, Bowen, Dorfman, & Podskaoff, 1990; Yukl, 1998). Advocacy may also result in the group being assigned to more interesting or challenging tasks, which may also motivate the group to maintain their success.

In working to provide the necessary resources, leaders also need to be especially attuned to when feedback is having the effect of frustration



rather than motivation because the group views its goal boundaries as too broad or unattainable. When this is the case, the team leader should work with the group either to make the goal more attainable or to establish subgoals (Campion & Lord, 1982). In doing so, the leader should give specific feedback about procedures and behaviors that will make it possible to accomplish these revised goals. One way to do this is to reframe or "redefine success and failure in terms of instructive feedback and learning. That is, success is not based on the outcome, but it comes from the information gained via the task attempt" (Lindsley et al., 1995, p. 662). This motivates groups to self-reflect and become more self-aware because they do not fear punishment (i.e., develop evaluation apprehension).

The second basic motivation strategy leaders can employ is trust building. Existing research indicates motivational losses in groups are often based in lack of trust due to perceived injustice and free riding by others (Kerr & Bruun, 1983; Kidwell, 1993; Latane, Williams, & Harkins, 1979; Lind & Tyler, 1988). Feeling of injustice can lead to a downward spiral of dissatisfaction, withdrawal, and shirking (Kerr & Bruun, 1983; Latane et al., 1979). Leaders generally have the authority to change group procedures, re-assign roles, or resolve conflicts. One effective method for building trust and motivation before this spiral starts is for the leader to provide "artifacts" of autonomy that represent faith in the group's ability (Schein, 1992)—for example, allowing group members to attend continuing education or skill development courses (Benne & Sheats, 1948; Manz & Sims, 1987), doing away with time cards, or allowing participation in the re-evaluation of reward systems (Goodman et al., 1988).

In sum, the leader must not only be aware of how the group and external environment are functioning (as well anticipate future changes), but must also be able to regulate the timing and impact of his or her own involvement with the team. Different tensions and regulatory errors require different teaching, intervention, and resources in order to get the group back on track (Tubbs, 1998). The leader must be aware of how to match his or her influence with each group situation, as well as the potential consequences an intervention might have.

## Other Implications of Adopting a Self-Regulation Perspective

In addition to the tactics for achieving goal clarity, self-awareness, and motivation within the group that we were able to glean from the existing literature, there are a number of other significant implications for success

ful leadership that come from adopting a self-regulation perspective on groups. Each of these implications finds empirical support at the individual level, but as yet is largely untested at the group level. We suggest them here as testable hypotheses for scholars to pursue in the future:

1. *Leadership emerges from tactics to engage group awareness, goal clarity, and motivation of group members to address performance gaps.* Although there is an existing body of research on emergent and shared leadership (e.g., Hollander, 1980; Yukl, 1998), none of it comes from a group-regulation perspective. These perspectives do recognize the positive (i.e., motivation, innovation) aspects of autonomy and participation, but they do not address how groups can balance competing tensions in the absence of an authority to enforce, reward, or correct destructive group or individual activities or patterns. We suggest that individuals who are able to help groups satisfy the three tenets of group regulation will be ascribed leadership characteristics by other members because of their ability to help groups avoid regulatory pitfalls and correct and learn from regulatory problems. Some indirect evidence for this point already exists in the literature: (a) leaders with both technical and social skills have been found to be motivating to groups (Bass, 1990), (b) leaders that encourage self-criticism and evaluation were rated as most effective (Manz & Sims, 1987), and (c) leaders most able to build relationships on both sides of group boundaries led their teams to greater success (Druskat & Wheeler, 2001). In short, individuals who are able to balance social and technical tensions in groups will most likely inspire the confidence of others in the group and emerge as a leader.

2. *Individuals and groups who are high in conscientiousness are good at self-regulation and more likely to be good at group regulation.* Two recent studies suggest that individuals high in conscientiousness are more likely to set achievement goals and stick to them until accomplished, and thus perform better (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Sansone, Wiebe, & Morgan, 1999). They argue that high-conscientiousness individuals are better able to self-regulate because they are able to delay gratification. We suggest that this may also hold true for leaders and at the group level as well. There is some preliminary evidence to support this claim. For example, Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, and Mount (1998) found that groups with higher mean levels of conscientiousness were rated more highly by their supervisors. Also, Peterson, Smith, Martorana, and Owens (2003) found that leader conscientiousness was related to positive team dynamics and firm financial performance in top management teams.



3. *When goal attainment is slower than expected, groups will progress through the following sequence: (1) increase effort, (2) shift attention to other goals, and then (3) quit the goal entirely.* In a recent meta-analysis of the past 30 years of research on feedback interventions, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) suggest that individuals deal with negative feedback by first working harder to overcome the problem, then shift their attention to other goals they see as more achievable (e.g., subgoals), and then finally quit the goal entirely if it is not achieved in a certain amount of time. We suggest that this same process may work at the group level. Groups that are successfully self-regulating will be better at working their way through this process appropriately. Self-regulating groups will neither fail by shifting away from their goals too easily because of a lack of collective efficacy (e.g., Bandura, 1986); nor will they fail by persisting too long in their goals (e.g., Staw & Ross, 1987). In other words, successful self-regulation should lead to a reduction in susceptibility to common information processing errors.

4. *Leader feedback focused on the group task rather than individual contributions to the task are more likely to improve group performance.* In addition to their finding about the tactics that people engage in to address negative feedback, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) also found that feedback focused more toward the task rather than the individual is more likely to improve performance at the individual level because individual feedback can be personally threatening. Therefore, we hypothesize that feedback given at the group level is more likely to improve group performance when directed at the task rather than specific individuals. To be motivating, individual feedback is probably best given in private and also focused toward task activities rather than being personal critique. In this way the leader will not compound competing tensions between group members (e.g., need for recognition), but instead focus them more on regulating for strategies of task success.

5. *Chronic error of one kind should lead to reorganization or resetting of goals.* Building on Hypothesis 3, self-regulation theory suggests that repeated failure should lead to re-evaluation or resetting of goals in order to achieve success (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Vancouver, 2000). For the group level this may be the essence of vision in leadership, convincing the group to alter course in the face of repeated failure. This highlights the need for a leader to help a group recognize, learn from mistakes, and redefine their efforts as necessary. Successful group regulation means that errors are learned from, do not become chronic or routine, and that work practices and goals are appropriately adjusted.

6. *Groups can run without regulation interventions (i.e., leadership) only so long as the environment remains stable.* Once established with regular (successful) patterns of feedback and self-awareness raising, established norms and process routines should be sufficient for groups to function without leadership so long as the external and internal group environments remain relatively stable. Once operating conditions become unstable (e.g., negative feedback, team turnover, etc.), we would expect the re-activation of naturally competing tensions, as the group has to re-clarify and re-define how to focus internal activity. This re-activation predisposes the group to regulatory failure and it may need assistance to readjust goals (i.e., vision). Hence, the often heard call for greater leadership in uncertain times.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter is intended to begin a discussion about leadership as group regulation. Specifically, we propose here that group regulation failures are natural and illustrate the need for leadership as a corrective tool for these failures. We are optimistic about the future of group regulation theory to provide fresh insight into effective leadership for two reasons. First, the notion of leadership as group regulation nicely organizes many existing findings in the leadership literature, which is large but extremely fragmented (see Bass, 1990). More importantly, however, we were able to generate a number of novel hypotheses from a rather basic application of self-regulation theory. Although our discussion here is preliminary, we believe a deeper analysis using group regulation theory will further elucidate these ideas and generate additional fresh perspective on why certain leadership behaviors are effective. Ultimately, of course, the real test of whether our application of self-regulation theory to group leadership is useful will be the results of future empirical tests of the novel hypotheses we generate from this perspective both here and in the future. We invite scholars interested in group decision making, leadership, or systems theory to join us in this effort.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Both authors contributed equally to this chapter. We thank all of the participants in the "New Thoughts on the Psychology of Leadership" conference, but especially Richard Hackman, Rod Kramer, and Dave Messick for particularly helpful insights and suggestions on earlier versions of this chapter. Correspondence concerning this chapter should be addressed to Randall S. Peterson, London Business School, Regent's Park, London NW1 4SA, United Kingdom. E-mail should be sent to: RPeterson@london.edu.



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# 8