

extend their professional development. Of course, there may be occasions when a groupwork project is devised for staff or student training, or to try a new approach to old, familiar problems. However, a group is more likely to take off when it is based on an assessment of being an effective way to meet a situation. Therefore, a preliminary to an effective group is research into client and worker opinions from which a statement or map can be made of the needs identified, the resources already available, and the gaps in service provision. Put another way, a group should be a response to clients rather than clients being created for a group initiative.

It will be apparent that these part-definitions apply to a wide variety of groups. Similarly, definitions of groupwork which refer to social functioning or helping members to cope more effectively with personal, social or environmental difficulties can embrace a wide variety of types of groups and more specific objectives. Consequently, to make sense of the term 'groupwork' and to facilitate clear thinking and practice, social (care) workers need to classify types of groups. From this classification they can determine the type of group they envisage or are interested in.

The categories that follow are not mutually exclusive since one type can contain elements of another. What will emerge too is the interplay between the main activity of the group, the style of the groupworkers and the purpose of the group. The purpose of the group dictates the nature of the group and, to some extent at least, the style of the leaders or facilitators. The nature of the group is dictated by the way that the members and/or leaders perceive the purpose of the group.

### Types of groups

Papell and Rothman (1966) classified groups according to whether the aim was remedial, social or both: that is, whether the aim was individual growth and rehabilitation, prevention of social breakdown, or mutual aid. Hartford (1972) differentiated according to whether the focus was individual (support, change, rehabilitation), interpersonal, problem-solving and task achievement (committee work, for example), environmental, or system change (pressure groups, for instance).

### Social groups

These groups are defined by their content: social or recreational activities. The purpose of these groups may be to overcome members' isolation, to provide a positive experience of relationships, or more simply to offer an opportunity for pleasure. The groupworkers may assume responsibility for the group's activities or seek to encourage members both to offer suggestions and to contribute their own resources and skills for the benefit of other members. Members may be encouraged to take responsibility for parts of the group in the belief that this, together with enabling them to develop their interests and skills, can increase their sense of fulfilment and self-worth. Examples are social clubs for survivors of mental distress or older people, day centres and youth clubs.

### Group psychotherapy

These groups aim to effect symptom relief and basic personality change. The emphasis is on enabling members to achieve their individual therapeutic goals. A variety of problems can be tackled effectively in group psychotherapy. Common among these are self-concepts like low self-esteem, lack of purpose and direction, and lack of a felt clear identity. Members may bring symptoms of anxiety, depression, ineffective coping with stress, poor performance at work or dissatisfaction with relationships. They may complain of emotional difficulties like the inability to express feelings or poor control over emotions. They may locate their difficulties in interpersonal functioning, usually described as the inability to achieve intimacy, discomfort in group situations, or lack of trust.

Members need to be motivated, wanting to change and prepared to work for it through self-exploration. Their wish to join the group should be voluntary and not the result of external pressure. They need to believe that the group will suit them and to accept the rationale on which group psychotherapy is founded. Since these groups rely heavily on verbal communication, members should be able to use verbal skills. A final requirement is psychological-mindedness, an ability to accept an appropriate psychological explanation of interactions and relationships within the self and between the self and others.

These groups have a present orientation, a here-and-now focus on what actually happens in the group between members, between them and the leaders, and between them and the group. There is a future orientation too, a focus on the goals of individual members, the options they possess, how they might choose from these and translate the choice into action. A focus on events that occur outside the group is discouraged, as is excessive historical inquiry into the origins of members' behaviour, although there may well be some focus on how transference and defence mechanisms become manifest among group members. The rationale for this process is that members can be helped to see that they are not unique, that they can derive support from other members as a result of which their resistance and reliance on habitual ways of relating will decrease and they can be encouraged to take risks. A further rationale is that members' behaviour in the group will be a direct reflection of their behaviour in life generally. These groups aim to enable members to become aware of their characteristic behaviours, with change emanating from a recognition of the ways members relate in the group and from using the encouragement and reinforcement of the group to try out new ways of relating both within and outside the group. In this process the leaders attempt to steer the group into a here-and-now focus and may direct their comments either to individuals, subgroups or the whole group. A fuller explanation of group psychotherapy may be found in Whitaker (2001).

#### Group counselling

These groups focus on resolving particular problems or modifying specific situations. Usually members share a common problem or face a similar transition or life crisis. Focus is maintained on this problem or issue, which is clearly identified, and little attention is paid to other problems unless the group agrees to expand the focus. The problems may be practical and material, for example negotiating one's way through organisations dealing with welfare benefits, or they may be emotional and interpersonal. Here examples would include groups focusing on depression, isolation, bereavement, children who are beyond the control of their parents or who have been sexually abused, or difficulties facing step-parents on joining a family. One task for the workers is to help members

identify and retain focus. Another is to enable members to build links between themselves. The groupworkers seek to enable the group to clarify the problem, to share solutions adopted by individual members and to help members individually and as a group to take decisions and to develop behaviours that relate to the demands of the situation. In focusing on the problem or issue, and the feelings that members hold in relation to it, environmental factors should not be overlooked either as contributory factors to the problem or as targets for change.

#### Educational groups

In one form of educational group, the purpose is to offer information and to impart skills through direct instruction. For example, a benefits group might aim to inform members of their welfare rights and to instruct them on how they may obtain these rights. A practical skills group might aim to introduce members to easier ways of dealing with practical problems in the home when on a low income and to provide an environment where basic skills are acquired through practice.

In another form, the purpose is to orientate and prepare members for life stages, new experiences and challenges, the prospect of which may arouse fear, uncertainty or disorientation. These groups focus on a change in status or position and work through the feelings aroused by transitions: from primary to secondary school, from school into employment, from early adulthood into midlife, from work into retirement or unemployment. Groups for people awaiting discharge from psychiatric hospital into the community, for prospective foster and adoptive parents and for couples hoping to have a child through assisted reproduction may fall into this category. There may be some information-giving but the emphasis is usually on developing abilities and behaviours and identifying strengths and resilience which have been underused or not needed previously.

In leading such groups, it is important to consider how people learn. Effective learning is less likely to come from without, from knowledge transmitted in a teacher-student format. It is more likely to follow from members' willingness to engage in shared learning to resolve difficulties or challenges felt by them to be real. It is more likely to follow from facilitated discovery and a willingness to

participate in a process of curiosity and inquiry. Members contribute their own experiences, offer their ideas and knowledge to a shared learning process, acquire support from the group, and through discussion or simulation exercises consider how to approach the situation they are facing.

### Social treatment groups

This cluster of groups may be subdivided into four. First, groups aiming to maintain adaptive patterns of behaviour and functioning or to enhance social functioning that is apparent already. These groups have a reinforcement and supportive orientation. Second, groups aiming to modify patterns of behaviour and functioning which may be disabling the individual. These groups have a change orientation. The purpose may be to enable individual members to give up redundant behaviours, adaptations that they have continued to repeat after they have lost their meaning or to apply outside the context in which they were serviceable. Alternatively, the purpose may be to encourage members to give up behaviours that are defined as deviant and unacceptable.

Third, problem-centred groups aiming to improve members' abilities to handle and resolve problems. The group is concerned with specific difficulties located either within or external to the individual members. The group process and the influence of group members are used to achieve this aim. Examples include social skills groups, youth offending groups and groups for sexually abused children. Fourth, compensatory groups, where the aim is not so much to effect change but, through activities, to provide members with life experiences on which they have missed out. The aim is to compensate for this deprivation. Activity groups for children are one example of this type of activity.

### Discussion groups

In these groups the focus is on the general rather than the particular, on topics of interest to members rather than on specific difficulties or problems. The groupworkers' task is to create an atmosphere of trust and support in the group so that members may voice and develop their interests and use the contributions of other members. For example, groups in residential care may be used to

enable members to reminisce or to contemplate what might improve quality of life in that setting.

### Self-help groups

These groups may have a variety of aims, from campaigning for attitude or social change to using the group's resources for support and individual problem resolution. They can, therefore, deal with a range of problems (Habermann, 1990), using different configurations – open or closed membership, focusing on a formalised programme or member interests and on individuals or an issue outside the group (Matzat, 1993). They comprise people who feel that they have a common problem or need, often inadequately covered by statutory services, and who join together to address it. Accordingly, authenticity, reciprocity, equality, mutuality and a common language tend to be core components of self-help groups (Habermann, 1990; Matzat, 1993).

The attitude of professionals towards self-help groups has been ambivalent, sometimes idealistic, sometimes sceptical. Hill (2001) suggests both that professionals often do not understand self-help groups and that their assistance is, therefore, not always meaningful, and that service users hold back for fear of further losses. Members may find the concept off-putting and have to overcome their fears, of being judged for example, even when other sources of support have been extinguished. Personal contact with peers or a professional facilitator (Schneewind, 1996), then, may facilitate entry into the group.

Groupworkers may form a group with the purpose of becoming less central in or less responsible for the group, to the point where the group continues to meet without them. However, such self-help groups may fail if sufficient agency support is not forthcoming and if groupworkers withdraw from facilitation too hastily.

### Social action groups

Cohen (2003) suggests that these groups encompass personal, interpersonal and political dimensions. Accordingly, where these groups are focused on structural analysis and macro change, nonetheless, those engaged in them may experience positive personal and interpersonal changes as a result of their participation. Those people

engaged in social action groups for the purposes of interpersonal change may find that social divisions shift as a result.

Many people, whether or not they are clients of social welfare agencies, are trapped in social and economic deprivation. Social action groups aim to utilise a group's resources for collective power as a vehicle for campaigning for social change and for the rights as well as the needs of group members. These groups are often formed around issues like housing standards, community facilities or welfare rights.

### Self-directed groups

In the groups identified above, the aims are identified either by the groupworkers or by them in conjunction with the group's members. In self-directed groups (Mullender and Ward, 1991), members rather than groupworkers determine the direction and objectives of the group. These groups may be problem-centred, focusing on problems which members raise. They require, as do self-help groups, that members work together and find their own solutions, not just from within the resources of the group members but through attempting to influence and change people outside the group. Like social action groups, they may campaign on issues arising from members' concerns expressed once the group has formed. A key goal often is some aspect of external change together with the development of members' self-esteem and assertiveness. The group identifies the skills, knowledge and abilities within it and these are harnessed to enable members to work on the issues that the group has identified. Thus, in self-directed groups groupworkers have a facilitative rather than a leadership role, which comprises (McKernan McKay *et al.*, 1996) enabling group members to take decisions and to increase their sense of competence, to find material and access resources, and to experience success and to evaluate their work. The role is collaborative – knowledge and experience are offered to but not imposed on the group.

### Using group classifications

This classification illustrates that groupwork can address a variety of aims and purposes, and that group types are not mutually exclusive. Rather, a particular design can incorporate features of several

types of groups. Therefore, an early task for practitioners who intend to lead or facilitate a group is to identify the type of group they wish to be involved in.

### putting into practice: framing a group

- Is the group a collection of individuals being formed by groupworkers for a specific purpose, or rather a preexisting group whose existence is being extended to cover a new purpose, or a permanent group for which the groupworker's knowledge may prove useful?
- Is the main focus on internal personal change, on interpersonal change, or external social action?
- Is the group self-directed or one where, at least initially, the groupworkers are central to how it manages both its task and processes?

In selecting from this classification, groupworkers will be influenced by the goals they and group members have in mind, the style of work and leadership or facilitation which they favour, and the value base which underpins their social work practice. Determining the type of group will be shaped by the objectives and aims with which the groupworkers begin. It should also be influenced and modified through a dialogue with members when social workers offer their services to an existing group or interview prospective members referred to a group which they are hoping to form. Having achieved a degree of clarity on the type of group to be conducted and the aims for that group, questions of structure such as size, duration and open or closed membership can be resolved.

### Rims, purposes and uses of groupwork

Groupwork does have its limitations. Generally, groups cannot provide exclusive attention to an individual member. As discussed earlier, groups should not become an alternative setting for one-to-one work with the addition of an audience. Whether a group has goals that are defined in terms of social action, individual-centred