

A Descriptive Study of Work Groups in the Swedish and U.S. Economy

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The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the internal dynamics of work groups and productivity. Specifically work group size and group age in months will be analyzed. Next, the characteristics of work groups in four sectors of the U.S. and Swedish economy, business, manufacturing, education and health care work groups are explored, with regard to the stages of work group development and productivity.

WORK GROUP DEVELOPMENT

The concept of work group development is well documented in the literature (e.g., Bennis & Shepard, 1956; Bion, 1961; Mann, 1966; Wheelan, 2005). Researchers have conducted extensive reviews of the literature to consolidate previous work and to propose a unified model of group development (e.g., Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Wheelan, 2005). A brief description of the integrated model of group development follows. The validity of the integrated model has been established in a number of investigations (Verdi & Wheelan, 1992; Wheelan & Abraham, 1993; Wheelan, Davidson, & Tilin, 2003; Wheelan & Krasick, 1993; Wheelan & McKeage, 1993).

The first stage of group development (dependency and inclusion) is characterized by significant member dependency on the designated leader, concerns about safety, and inclusion issues. In Stage 1, members rely on the leader to provide direction. Group members may engage in activities such as exchanging stories about outside events or other activities that are not relevant to group goals.

During this stage, members tend to agree with the suggestions made by the leader. Productivity levels during Stage 1 tend to be low. The second stage of group development is referred to as a period of counterdependency. At Stage 2, members often disagree among themselves about group goals and procedures. Conformity with emerging group norms, evident at Stage 1, decreases. Conflict is an inevitable part of this stage. The group's task is to develop a unified set of goals, values, norms, and operational procedures. That task inevitably generates some conflict, which is necessary for the establishment of trust and a climate in which members feel free to disagree with each other.

If the group manages to work through the inevitable conflicts of Stage 2, member trust, commitment to the group, and willingness to cooperate increase. Also, communication becomes more open and task oriented. The third stage of group development, referred to as the trust and structure stage, is characterized by mature negotiations about roles, organization, and procedures. Stage 3 also is a time in which members work to solidify positive work relationships with each other. Member conformity with group goals and norms increases during Stage 3 because consensus about these goals and norms has been achieved. Group productivity begins to increase as well. The fourth stage of group development is a time of intense productivity and effectiveness. Having resolved many of the issues of the previous stages, group members and the leader can focus their energy on goal achievement and task accomplishment.

Based on this well documented theory, this study analyzed 857 work groups, group stages, group age in months and group size. 816 work groups in four sectors of the U.S. economy were explored as well. In addition, 764 Swedish work groups from four sectors were analyzed.

Work Group Stages **US**

n = 857

STAGE I 202 23%	STAGE II 183 21.4%
STAGE III 294 34.3%	STAGE IV 178 20.8%

Work Group Stages **Swedish**

n = 764

STAGE I 219 28.7%	STAGE II 164 21.5%
STAGE III 228 29.8%	STAGE IV 153 20%

How long does the development process take in months? **US**

STAGE I 2.6	STAGE II 3.1
STAGE III 4.7	STAGE IV 4.7 – 8.5

How long does the development process take in months? **Swedish**

Mean age of groups between 1-12 months old, n = 210, M = 7.3

STAGE I 6.4	STAGE II 7.1
STAGE III 8.0	STAGE IV 8.2

WORK GROUP AGE

458 Work Groups, Age in Months **US**

1-5 N = 108 23%	6-10 N = 151 33%
11-15 N = 116 25%	16-20 N = 83 19%

323 Work Groups, Age in Months **Swedish**

1-5 N = 104 32%	6-10 N = 89 28%
11-15 N = 78 24%	16-20 N = 52 16%

WORK GROUP SIZE

709 Work Groups and Size **US**

3-7 N = 327 46%	8-12 N = 243 34%
13-17 N = 56 8%	18+ N = 83 12%

748 Work Groups and Size **Swedish**

Mean size = 7.4 members

3-7 N = 421 56%	8-12 N = 274 37%
13-17 N = 41 5%	18+ N = 12 2%

175 Manufacture Work Groups **US**

STAGE I N = 39 23%	STAGE II N = 43 24%
STAGE III N = 54 31%	STAGE IV N = 38 22%

207 Manufacture Work Groups **Swedish**

STAGE I N = 82 39%	STAGE II N = 47 23%
STAGE III N = 60 29%	STAGE IV N = 18 9%

128 Education Work Groups **US**

STAGE I N = 28 21%	STAGE II N = 20 16%
STAGE III N = 48 38%	STAGE IV N = 32 25%

255 Education Work Groups **Swedish**

STAGE I N = 50 20%	STAGE II N = 43 17%
STAGE III N = 88 34%	STAGE IV N = 74 29%

97 Health Care Work Groups **US**

STAGE I N = 21 22%	STAGE II N = 27 28%
STAGE III N = 32 32%	STAGE IV N = 17 18%

79 Health Care Work Groups **Swedish**

STAGE I N = 19 24%	STAGE II N = 36 46%
STAGE III N = 13 16%	STAGE IV N = 11 14%

416 Business Work Groups **US**

STAGE I N = 113 27%	STAGE II N = 82 20%
STAGE III N = 128 30%	STAGE IV N = 93 23%

160 Business Work Groups **Swedish**

STAGE I N = 47 29%	STAGE II N = 24 15%
STAGE III N = 51 32%	STAGE IV N = 38 24%

Conclusions

- There is a similar distribution of groups per stages (I – IV) in the Swedish and US economy, although 5% more stage I and 5% less stage III in Sweden
- Sweden seems to have somewhat smaller groups
- Mean age of young (range 1-12 months) stage IV groups is 8,2 months (range 3 - 12 months)
- Comparisons over sectors ...
 - Manufacture: Sweden more stage I and less stage IV (diff. samples?)
 - Education: No difference
 - Health Care: Sweden more stage II and less stage III (diff. samples?)
 - Business: No differences

Thank you for listening!

Susan & Christian