

## Microgroup theory

*Microgroup theory is a socio-psychological theory of a small group. The main idea of the theory lies in the analysis of group processes and phenomena through the prism of informal subgroups as collective activity subjects and also non-involved-in-them members who comprise the group. In the given paper it is presented in the view of general and particular positions that reflect two interconnected conceptual scopes – group as a system with its phenomenology and group dynamics. The most fundamental constituents of group activity are reflected in general postulates. Particular postulates are formulated on the basis of general ones and they describe concrete phenomena, their manifestation and modification at the group level, at the subgroup level, and also at the individual's level.*

**Key words:** *small group, informal subgroup, socio-psychological structure, group dynamics, contradiction, integration–disintegration, phenomena.*

**Nowadays there is** a great number of small group theories; in each of these theories specific subject-matter, a circle of phenomena under study, conceptual apparatus are identified. All these theories can be grouped variously, for instance, depending on the selected-for-analysis level of group activity and the subject-matter.

The subject-matter of different theories is referred to varied characteristics of either the individual's level or group level. The subject-matter at the individual's level is presented by needs, motives (for example, three-dimensional theory of interpersonal behavior), behavior (theories of social exchange and dependency, theory of rational self-interest, theories of mutual interest and collective action), application of symbols (symbolic convergence theory), cognitions (theory of social comparison processes, social identity theory, self-categorization theory), emotions (sociometry theory), interpersonal relations (sociometry theory, theory of activity mediation in interpersonal relations). The subject-matter at the group level is group parameters (parameter conception), characteristics of group activity in environment (theory of realistic conflict).

In spite of a great number of available theories the general state of theoretical knowledge in the field of a small group, in the view of many specialist, leaves much to be desired. First, each theory has no conceptual framework that would permit to explain simultaneously a wide spectrum of phenomena and processes of both external and internal group activity. This

is determined by several circumstances among which only two ones are to be noted, those having direct relation to this information. In the majority of theories an emphasis is made as a rule on a certain one specific phenomenon or process (for instance, on social comparison or symbol application), that substantially restricts theory potentialities. Therefore, ideally, a theory must be based on applying and analyzing fundamental processes and phenomena that will permit to investigate effectively different particular processes and phenomena. The other circumstance is that actually in all theories of a small group, informal subgroups (as objective reality and the level of group activity), their psychological characteristics, internal and external ties are not taken into consideration. This looks paradoxically as informal subgroups are an integral attribute of an overwhelming majority of small groups of different types. Second, availability of a majority of theoretical approaches in various scientific disciplines (including those within social psychology) is regarded today as one of the main factors that produced a problem of interdisciplinary diversification in the field of small groups [2,7,8].

There are two trends of further movement on the theoretical plane of science. The first of them is connected with providing interdisciplinary integration [1,3-7,9,12]. The second trend assumes creation of the theory of a high generalization level that is to set new coordinates for research and conceiving group activity. This is a complicated task but it acquires more and more acute character in the scientific community.

The goal of the paper is to give a comprehensive and systematized representation of a new socio-psychological theory of a small group – microgroup theory [10,11]. The main idea of the theory lies in the analysis of group socio-psychological processes and phenomena through the prism of informal subgroups (microgroups) and also non-involved-in-them members that comprise a small group. For instance, manifestation of some phenomena (cohesiveness, compatibility, conflicts and other things) at the group level is determined by socio-psychological characteristics of subgroups and interrelationships between subgroups, but other phenomena (adaptation, informal leadership, guidance and so on) – by the individual's position in the context of involvement/non-involvement in the subgroup. Besides, the theory is oriented towards the analysis of subgroups themselves in the context of the whole group and external conditions of group life-activity. In addition, it is not limited by the analysis of some single subgroup characteristic, but takes into account demand-motivational, socio-perceptual and behavioral aspects of internal and external subgroup activity.

Studying all group activity in the context of informal subgroups we quantitatively and qualitatively draw boundaries of the analytical perspective apart at the expense of : (a) reconstructing all group constituent components as a system, (b) re-comprehending relations to be investigated, and (c) examining a subgroup along with its relations both as a subject-matter and as an analysis unit of group processes and phenomena as a whole. Thus, attention is focused on relations ‘subgroup–subgroup’, ‘subgroup–individual’, ‘subgroup–group’, ‘individual–subgroup–individual’, ‘individual–subgroup–group’, ‘individual–subgroup–community’, ‘individual–subgroup–group–group/community’, ‘subgroup–group–group/community’, ‘group–group–subgroup’, ‘group–group–subgroup–subgroup’. Some relations are principally novel for research (for instance, ‘subgroup–subgroup’ or ‘subgroup–group’), but other relations (‘individual–subgroup–individual’, ‘individual–subgroup–group’, ‘individual–subgroup–group–group/community’) represent by themselves widening relations being studied conventionally (‘individual–individual’, ‘individual–group’, ‘individual–group–individual’, ‘individual–group–group/community’). Advancing in the scope of the above relations one may realize group processes and phenomena in the other view. There arises an opportunity to coordinate with each other all three levels of group activity (individual, subgroup, group), to comprehend more adequately each of them separately and external/internal group activity as a whole.

Microgroup theory is based on five key concepts of the first order and two concepts of the second order. Three concepts of the first order – ‘informal subgroup’, ‘involved-in-subgroup individual’, ‘non-involved-in-subgroup individual’ – make up a ‘socio-psychological structure’ (the concept of the second order) which reflects the group structure. Two other concepts of the first order – ‘contradiction’ and ‘integration-disintegration processes’ – comprise the basis of ‘group dynamics’ (the concept of the second order) fixing the modification of a group, subgroup, individual. All these concepts taken together make up a conceptual framework. Consider three circumstances. First, all concepts are inseparably linked with each other. Second, in fact no one of the existing theories operates with underlined concepts of the first order. As for the concepts of the second order, they are filled with another content differing from that which one can often come across in the literature. Third, concepts of the first order reflect basic, initial, but not particular-in-their-content phenomena. Thus, the theory includes two conceptually interrelated spaces: (1) group as a system and its phenomena, and (2) group dynamics.

Microgroup theory contains general and particular postulates. The most fundamental constituents of group activity are reflected in general

postulates. Particular postulates are formulated on the basis of general ones and they describe concrete phenomena, their manifestation and modification at the group level (group phenomena as a whole are analyzed in the light of subgroups existing within the group), at the subgroup level (subgroup phenomena), and also at the individual's level (in the context of the individual's involvement/non-involvement in a subgroup).

## GENERAL THEORY POSITIONS

### KEY NOTIONS

***Informal subgroup*** is the total sum of group members united on the basis of one or several psychological properties more common and meaningful for the time being compared with other group members.

Informal subgroups are presented as varied objective rather than subjective socio-psychological categories. Depending on the activity perspective there are *situational* and *relatively stable subgroups*. Situational subgroups arise for solving a concrete tactic task assuming limited-in-space-and-time activity. Relatively stable subgroups are formed on the basis of strategic intentions (conscious and unconscious) of members or with respect to their constant activity and conditions of being in a group. Depending on cohesion motivation, activity vectors and peculiarities of members' relations, subgroups may be *task* and *socio-emotional*. Emergence and subgroup activity of a task type are determined by individual pragmatic goals of members or/and by a purpose of group activity. At the basis of formation and life activity of subgroups of a socio-emotional type there is attraction and sympathy, and the basic goal of such subgroup members lies in supporting good relations. Subgroups may be *decentralized* and *centralized* depending on means of members' relations within them. In the decentralized subgroup all members possess similarity at least by one key indication. In the centralized subgroup there is a sense of the common among members with one/two individuals, and through him/her with the rest subgroup members. Listed typologies have some convention which is of necessity for more suitable analysis, for in practice one cannot often observe subgroups representing themselves this or that type of formation in a bright fashion. Side by side with subgroups in the group, *intergroup subgroups* may arise that comprise people involved in different small groups of the same broader social community (secondary groups).

***Socio-psychological structure of small group*** is informal subgroups and non-involved-in-them members who possess general and specific socio-psychological characteristics and are in certain relations to each other and to the group as a whole.

*Non-involved-in-subgroups members* (“self-dependent members”) are not completely autonomous, in no way related to other group members. In many situations they are oriented to the position of those or other subgroups towards a certain issue. There are two types of members of such a category. Some people prefer to keep a distance from the rest of group members and do not join any subgroups. Others experience desire to be involved into any subgroup but this subgroup proves to be closed for them. One more category is “shuffling” members. They tend to be involved simultaneously into several subgroups without entering close relations with them.

We shall consider external and internal *contradictions* (but not needs or conflict) as a universal self-transformation source of a small group, informal subgroup and personality. Contradiction as opposition and negation of sides initiates and intensifies intragroup and intergroup interaction, socio-perceptual and affective processes of group members.

*Integration and disintegration processes.* External and internal processes of integration and disintegration (but not differentiation or stability–instability, order–chaos, and so on) are a universal mechanism of group dynamics. Transformation mechanism is latently reflected in the dialectical law “the unity of mutually excluding and simultaneously mutually supposing opposites”. If this law is to stratify into two constituents, then integration process are referent to “the unity of mutually supposing opposites”, but disintegration process – to “the unity of mutually excluding opposites”. Both processes are interconnected and linked to contradictions.

*Group dynamics* is the transformation of the whole group socio-psychological structure or its separate components. First of all, this is formation, transformation, destruction of subgroups and their external relations (i.e., of each subgroup with the rest of the group).

## **INTEGRITY AND COMPLEXITY OF SMALL GROUP**

*Integrity of small group and informal subgroup.* Institutionalized (formal) small group is initially characterized by social integrity, whereas its psychological integrity is a result of group activity that rarely occurs in practice. Within the foundation of group social integrity there are relations set by the social structure (society) and attached to the similar social activity set from outside.

Psychological integrity of small group depends on the relations between subgroups, subgroups and “self-dependent” members. It takes place mostly when all members are obliged to be clearly aware of their

group affiliation and necessity to combine efforts – in case of opposition of the whole group and internal social context that bears a threat for “I–image” and “We–image”.

A subgroup is not set from outside, but is initially determined by individual characteristics of the members and possesses its psychological integrity. Within the foundation of subgroup integrity there are those or other psychological relations (including perhaps those concerning group activity), which in any concrete case are determined by the specific motives of uniting people into a subgroup.

***Complexity of organizing a small group.*** The general indication of group complexity as a system is the formation out of the sum total of single individuals of socio-psychological structure. Group complexity is determined by several variables: (a) a number of subgroups, (b) measure and content of relations between subgroups, between subgroups and non-involved-in-them members, and (c) measure of realizing subgroup functions with respect to the group. The greater the number of subgroups is, the stronger the bond between them (integrative and disintegrative content), and the stronger subgroup functions are expressed with regard to the group, the more complex the organization of small group is.

### **INFORMAL SUBGROUP AS A COLLECTIVE SUBJECT OF GROUP ACTIVITY**

Group activity is represented not only by individuals (P – active mode) or group activity as a whole (G -mode), but also informal subgroups (S- mode). In the last case subgroups represent collective subjects (communication and co-activity subjects) who focus their members’ activity to themselves (inner vector) and to the group (outer vector).

#### ***Internal vector of individuals’ activity concentration.***

- Relation density and interaction intensity within subgroups are considerably higher than in the entire group.
- Subgroups, distinct from single group members, are characterized by the same properties as the entire group is. Moreover, some properties (cohesiveness, compatibility, identification, reference, adaptation, psychological impact) are much stronger, but other properties (conflicts, competition, or various forms of interaction minimization) are weaker expressed in subgroups than in the group as a whole.
- As subjects of life activity, subgroups have their own goals, norms and values limiting members’ behavior within subgroups.
- Subjects acquire functions with regard to their members

#### ***External vector of individuals’ activity concentration.***

- Subgroups possess a certain psychological status in the group in the same way as single members do, though a status of another kind – similar to the status characteristic for the entire group in social environment. This status will define the measure of subgroup influence on the group activity.
- Subgroup goals, norms and values regulate behavior of its members not only within the subgroup, but also in the context of the entire group and, probably, beyond the group, with such parameters of a leading group being often common group ones. That is, subgroup goals and norms prescribe behavior of the rest group members, at least in meaningful situations.
- Subgroups in this or another way fulfill functions with regard to the group as a whole .

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### **CAUSES OF ORIGIN AND FUNCTIONS OF INFORMAL SUBGROUP**

The only common indication underlying the formation of small group does not ensure its formation as a stable psychological community, for it does not objectively reflect a broad specter of individual goals and motives of group members.

The unification of group members into subgroups is connected with sharpening contradictions when a group as a whole is unable to realize these or other functions with regard to individual goals and needs of members proper. That is, a subgroup assumes those functions with respect to the individual, which are traditionally prescribed to a small group.

With regard to its members a subgroup fulfills the functions of: informing, providing support for realizing individual goals, ensuring individuals' realization of social needs, providing security within a small group, and adaptive, normative functions as well. With respect to the group a subgroup may realize the following functions: of regulating/stabilizing

group activity, **group assignments fulfillment**, organizing and coordinating activity of the entire group, and a normative function.

By intensifying disintegrative group interaction with external social context (for instance, with the other group), group function to provide support for all members increases.

### **MOTIVATION AND SOCIO-PERCEPTUAL PROCESSES IN FORMING INFORMAL SUBGROUP**

*Motivation.* The analysis of motives for psychological cohesion in a small group is not adequate for it results in too averaged characteristic in the entire group. Therefore it is necessary to analyze motives of uniting people into subgroups. Group members are united into a subgroup on the basis of not a single motive, but concurrently on the basis of several motives that are common for majority of them. Different subgroups of the same group have not only specific motives, but may have similar-in-content motives.

*Socio-perceptual processes* of organizing group members into subgroups are those of comparison and categorization in accordance with significant indications, interpersonal and microgroup identity (identity with a subgroup).

Comparison is made concurrently by means of similarity and distinction and assumes simultaneous comparison with other members and between themselves. Comparison in combination with categorization ensures leaving the interpersonal level for the level of comparing identified categories of people within the group, even in case they are not yet presented in the aspect of really formed subgroups with fixed boundaries. While approaching other people and forming groups microgroup comparison (comparison of one's own subgroup with other subgroups) comes to acquire greater importance than interpersonal one.

Involvement in a relatively stable subgroup with those people that have common meaningful properties bears with itself microgroup identity that is more expressed than group identity in subgroup members. Group identity will dominate either in case of meaningfulness loss of subgroup membership or in the situation of opposition of the entire group and environment, being a threat for "I-image" and "We-image".

### **ACTIVITY OF INFORMAL SUBGROUPS AND PERSONALITY**

Intragroup activity is to be considered as activity of subgroups and non-involved-in-them members, as interaction among all of them.



Interaction between subgroups within the group in its content being similar to the interaction between groups.

Behavior of a subgroup representative in the group has not only personal character but is that of a representative of this subgroup. That is, this person's activity is determined by socio-psychological characteristics of his subgroup rather than his individual psychological peculiarities. As a representative of a stable subgroup he manifests himself in the de-centered fashion in view of norms and values of his entire subgroup. This is especially notable in interaction with representatives of other subgroups.

Microgroup predetermination of human social behavior goes far beyond the group if there is a high level of his identification with his subgroup, **microgroup identity and references**. **First of all**, in direct group contact with environment this interaction will be estimated and realized by the individual from the position of his own subgroup, but not only from that of the entire group. **Second**, in different situations having nothing to do with group membership, an individual may construct his behavior rather as a representative of a subgroup than of a group.

Behavior of people non-involved in subgroups depends on their psychological qualities or either on orientation towards a concrete subgroup or on affiliation to the group as a whole.

## CONTRADICTIONS

Both contradiction and integration-disintegration processes in the group may be regarded in accordance with two types of relations: (a) subject–subject (e.g., individual–individual, individual–group), and (b) subject–performance/conditions.

*Types of socio-psychological group contradictions.* In the group different types of contradictions arise.

1. Interpersonal contradictions on the foundation of individual goals and members' needs: (a) between members within an informal subgroup, (b) between members of different subgroups, (c) between non-involved-in-the-subgroup members, and (d) between subgroup representatives and non-involved-in-them members.
2. Microgroup contradictions on the basis of goals and needs of informal subgroups: (a) between subgroups, (b) between single members of various subgroups as representatives of subgroup, and (c) between subgroup representatives and non-involved-in-them members.
3. Intergroup contradictions on the foundation of group goals and needs.

4. Individual-group/microgroup - between goals, group members' needs and opportunities of their satisfaction in the group (or subgroup).
5. Status - between members and a group official supervisor.
6. Activity - between group members' opportunities and requirements of performance/conditions: (a) between high opportunities and low requirements, and (b) between low opportunities and high requirements.

Listed above contradictions are most common for a majority of small group types. However, in each concrete group they are filled with their specific content.

Emergence and development of the same contradiction may occur on different grounds.

Kinds of contradictions are interconnected (with regard to direct and reverse ties), and therefore change of some contradictions entails that of others.

***Contradictions and group structure.*** First, in different structural group components contradictions will be presented variously. For instance, in the subgroup contradictions are less expressed along positions significant for its members (at personal and microgroup levels), and if they are sharpened, then they are more effectively resolved than in the context of the entire group. Second, subgroups, not only separate members are subjects and objects of contradictions of different types and to this or that extent are a source of contradictory tendencies of the entire group. Third, taking into account all types of group contradictions in their composition, on the one hand, and socio-psychological group structure, on the other hand, will allow to approach systematic analysis of contradiction phenomenon in a small group.

***Contradiction and socio-psychological impact on the group.*** Any impact may be reduced to handling contradictions (smoothing, resolving and initiating, sharpening), and through them – to integration and disintegration processes in the socio-psychological structure of small group.

## **INTEGRATION AND DISINTEGRATION PROCESSES**

***Correlation of integration–disintegration processes.*** These processes are displayed: (a) concurrently and in interrelationship that is determined by presence of different contradiction grounds, by different interaction levels (personality–subgroup–group–external social context) and by different realms (external and internal, task and socio-emotional) of

group activity, and (b) consistently that is defined by stages of developing and resolving contradictions.

***Different realms of group activity and integration–disintegration processes.*** First, increasing one process in any sphere of group (or subgroup) activity causes manifestation and enhancement of the opposite process in the other activity sphere. Second, integrative or disintegrative transformation of one group (or subgroup) parameter fixing some activity aspect may evoke corresponding transformation of the other parameter reflecting the other aspect of group (subgroup) activity. Third, predominance of integration/disintegration process in absence of unfavorable/favorable internal and external conditions leads to intensification of the corresponding process.

***Group activity levels and integration–disintegration processes.*** Integration–disintegration processes (and contradictions generating them) should be considered on the following interconnected planes: between a group and environment – between subgroups (between a subgroup and environment, between a subgroup and a group) – within subgroups (between an individual and subgroup, between individuals beyond the subgroup context).

***Integration–disintegration processes and group phenomena.*** These processes present themselves an essential tissue which is embodied into concrete–in–content forms of individual’s self-manifestation (for instance, personalization and depersonalization), individuals’ interaction (cooperation and competition, collaboration and conflict, assistance and counteraction), group phenomena (cohesiveness, compatibility, reference, adaptation, leadership, social influence). The notions “integrative phenomena” and “disintegrative phenomena” are conventional, for any phenomenon contains in its basis simultaneously integration and disintegration processes, but with a different measure of their expressiveness.

***Contradictions and integration–disintegration processes.*** A high level of external group (subgroup) contradictions defines a higher level of external disintegration and internal integrity. Conversely, a low level of external group (subgroup) contradictions determines a lower external disintegration and internal integrity. At the same time there is no similar connection between contradiction intensification and disintegration manifestation. Intensification of external group (subgroup) contradictions may lead to actualization of not only external disintegration, but external integration as well.

## EXTERNAL INTERACTION AND DYNAMICS MECHANISM

The key characteristics of interaction are: (a) interaction content (integration, disintegration, **relative social isolation**), (b) measure of usefulness of interaction outcome (effectiveness–ineffectiveness).

*External subgroup interaction and its internal processes.* Subgroup integration with the entire group (a part of the group) is connected with integration weakening within the subgroup, but disintegration is linked to integration intensification within the subgroup. Regular ineffectiveness or in some cases high intensity of external disintegrative subgroup interaction results in disintegrativeness intensification within the subgroup and in the long run in its partial or complete break-up.

*External group interaction and its internal processes.* Integration of a small group with environment (for instance, with the other group) leads to eroding group boundaries, to reducing its internal integrativeness and destruction of its socio-psychological structure. Enduring and intensifying external group integration will evoke in some subgroups without evident “integrative” phenomena distortion of boundaries and disintegrativeness increase, and in the other subgroups, in contrast, enhancement of their internal integrativeness and impenetrability of boundaries.

Intensification of disintegrative group interaction with environment evokes integration increase of the entire group and integration reduction within subgroups. Regular ineffectiveness or in some cases high intensity of disintegrative group interaction with environment causes disintegrativeness increase between subgroups and enhancement of integrativeness within subgroups or changes structural components (break-up, regrouping, emergence of new subgroups). Group restructuring may lead to its qualitatively new external activity or to resistance increase towards environment.

Limitation of social group contacts with environment determines pronounced group disintegration as a whole and integration increase within subgroups.

Preservation of institutionalized (formal) group in the process of its intensive integrative or disintegrative interaction with environment is ensured by both temporal or stable transformation of socio-psychological structure and by availability of social integrity.

## PARTICULAR THEORY POSITIONS

## **COHESIVENESS**

*Subgroup cohesiveness* in accordance with those or other grounds (**attractive**, cognitive and/or interactive, task and/or social) is much higher than cohesiveness of the entire group or the sum total of “self-dependent” members on the same grounds. Integration increase within the subgroup results in increase of subgroup cohesiveness, but disintegration increase leads to its reduction.

*Group cohesiveness.* Availability of subgroups in the group signifies that group cohesiveness must be studied from the viewpoint of subgroup activity and non-involved-in-them members, relationship between them by those or other grounds, but not only in view of the relation “individual-individual” or “individual-group”.

*External subgroup (group) interaction and cohesiveness.* External subgroup integration determines cohesiveness decrease, but external disintegration – subgroup cohesiveness increase; predominance of internal integration over external one, that of external disintegration over internal one will cause subgroup cohesiveness increase. Regular ineffectiveness or in some cases high intensity of external disintegrative subgroup interaction leads to subgroup cohesiveness decrease.

In case of limiting relations of a small group with environment, cohesiveness increases within subgroups and group cohesiveness decreases as a whole. By intensifying disintegrative group interaction with environment, the entire group cohesiveness increases at the expense of human consolidation around a leading subgroup or a single leader, and also at the expense of openness increase and subgroup cohesiveness decrease. In case of lasting and increasing external group disintegration and regular ineffectiveness of its activity, cohesiveness decrease of the entire group and cohesiveness increase within subgroups will occur.

## **COMPATIBILITY AND CO-ORDINATION**

*Compatibility and co-ordination of subgroup members* at the socio-psychological level are much more manifested within stable subgroups than in the entire group. Compatibility are more expressed in subgroups with a higher level of cohesiveness, identification and reference.

*Subgroup compatibility and co-ordination.* The analysis of socio-psychological compatibility and co-ordination of group members should be made by means search relation between subgroups, and not only by means relation between single individuals.

## **IDENTIFICATION**

*Identification within stable subgroups* is more expressed than in the entire group, between representatives of various subgroups or among “self-dependent” group members. “Self-dependent” members are more often

identified with subgroup representatives than with the same ones but non-involved-in-subgroup members. Integration increase within a subgroup is associated with identification increase within a subgroup, and disintegration enhancement – with its weakening.

***External subgroup (group) interaction and identification.*** External subgroup integration determines weakening identification, and external disintegration – identification increase within a subgroup. Regular ineffectiveness or in some cases high intensity of external disintegrating subgroup interaction causes reduction of microgroup identification.

Under ordinary conditions of group functioning, identification of human beings with the entire group is weaker expressed, and interpersonal identification is stronger within subgroups and also among “self-dependent” members, and between representatives of different structural categories. Limitations of group ties with environment, on the one hand, leads to levelling identification with a group as a whole, and, on the other hand, to dominating microgroup identification over interpersonal one, i.e., group members with their subgroup, and “self-dependent” members with some subgroup. In intensifying disintegrative group interaction with environment, identification with the entire group tends to predominate, and interpersonal and microgroup identification will be less expressed. In case of enduring and increasing external group disintegration and regular ineffectiveness of its activity, group identification decrease and microgroup identification increase will take place.

## **INTERPERSONAL AND MICROGROUP CONFLICTS**

Conflict is one of the forms of disintegrative interaction of the parties caused by contradictions worsening.

Not only single individuals, but subgroups as well act as subjects and objects of conflicts. Conflicts within subgroups, between “self-dependent” members and between members of different subgroups pursuing personal goals are *interpersonal* by their nature. *Microgroup conflicts* (conflicts between subgroups) have content similar to conflicts between groups.

***Interpersonal conflicts within stable subgroups*** are more transient and more often have another importance and consequences for their participants, than conflicts between representatives of different subgroups.

***External subgroup (group) interaction and conflicts.*** Enhancement of subgroup (especially microgroup) external conflictness is associated with weakening its formal conflictness.

Under ordinary conditions of small group life-activity, conflicts are presented by an interpersonal form. By limiting group relations with environment, microgroup conflicts will predominate and simultaneously

interpersonal contradictions within subgroups will decrease. Activity of non-involved-in-subgroups people may pass from interpersonal level to microgroup one when being cooperated with each other or openly supporting some subgroup. In intensifying disintegrative group interaction with environment, levelling conflicts between subgroups and interpersonal conflicts between “self-dependent” members occurs. In case of enduring and increasing external group disintegration and regular ineffectiveness of its activity, conflictness increase between subgroups and decrease of interpersonal contradictions within subgroups will take place.

### **INDIVIDUAL SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL STATUS**

***Group structure and individual status.*** Socio-psychological status (for instance, sociometric status, informal leadership–guidance) of the same individuals will differ in various structural group components. Subgroup members pertaining to one level of some status in their subgroup often do not have the same level in other subgroups or among “self-dependent” group members. The same applies for non-involved-in-subgroups members.

A group member should be treated as a high-status member in the group as a whole, provided he is perceived as such by a majority of subgroup members, but not only by representatives of his subgroup and/or by non-involved-in-subgroups members.

***Common group informal leaders*** coordinate relations between subgroups, between subgroup representatives and members non-involved in subgroups. Common group leader involved in some subgroup potentially experiences much stronger support for fulfilling his functions and more often will tend to realize, first of all, interests of his subgroup members compared to a common group leader non-involved in a subgroup. *Subgroup leaders* define activity orientation of their subgroups.

***External subgroup interaction and informal leadership.*** In case of indifferent interaction or integrative content between subgroups with similar statuses, subgroup representatives rather than “self-dependent” members will become group leaders. In case of disintegrative interaction between subgroups with a similar status, there either will be no common group leaders or among those there will be some of “self-dependent” members.

***A subgroup as a subject of informal leadership.*** In a small group not only a single personality acts as a subject of leadership, but also an informal subgroup does which is potentially able to realize leader’s functions more effectively than a single person.

***Formal leadership (Supervision).*** Effectiveness of group supervision does not depend so much on subordinates’ attitude to a

supervisor each taken separately, but rather than on the attitude on the part of subordinates of informal subgroups to him and also on a supervisor's reliance upon some subgroup.

### **SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCE**

Stable subgroup influence of its members is greater than impact of other subgroups or "self-dependent" members. "Self-dependent" group members oriented to some subgroup are more liable to its impact than to the entire group influence.

*External subgroup (group) interaction and its influence.* External subgroup integration is tied to weakening, and internal disintegration – to increasing effect within the subgroup.

By limiting group bonds with environment, group impact decreases and subgroup influence enhances on its members and on those "self-dependent" members who are oriented to given subgroup. By intensifying disintegrative group interaction with environment, group effect on its single representatives will rise. In case of lasting and increasing external group disintegration and regular ineffectiveness of its performance, decrease of entire group influence and increase of subgroup impact on its members will take place.

*Majority and minority influence.* Majority and minority influence is determined by the fact what they present themselves in the context of a socio-psychological group structure. That is, measure of their influence depends on various combinations of structured group categories in terms of which they are represented. Effectiveness of various impact factors described in the literature depends on their combinations as well.

Two minimum conditions for majority influence are as follows: (a) majority impact with a subgroup (or several subgroups) to be included into its composition will be greater than majority impact consisting only of the sum total of "self-dependent" members (provided minority is not presented by a leading subgroup), and (b) majority impact including an informal subgroup with a high psychological status will be greater than majority impact consisting of the sum total of insufficiently active subgroups and "self-dependent" members (provided minority is not presented by another leading subgroup).

Two minimum conditions of minority influence are as follows: (a) with "favorable" majority composition and similar psychological status in the group, influence of one member's opinion (minority) being a representative of a cohesive and active subgroup will be greater than an opinion of some single "self-dependent" member (minority), and (b) with "favorable" majority composition and similar psychological status in the



group, influence of an opinion of a highly-cohesive informal subgroup – minority will be greater than influence of the sum total of “self-dependent” members temporarily united in accordance with a concrete position as minority.

## **ADAPTATION**

***Group member adaptation.*** Individuals’ adaptation within the group is accomplished by means of involvement in subgroups, if a group does not provide an opportunity for its members to satisfy individual goals, needs and psychological unity in relation to parameters significant for them. If an individual is involved in the subgroup and enjoys his membership in it, his adaptation is more complete than adaptation in the group as a whole.

The more closed subgroup to the group is, the more intensively adaptation process of a subgroup member will be accomplished through his subgroup. In the open subgroup adaptation process will take place not only through the subgroup, but through the group as a whole.

***Newcomer’s adaptation.*** Different subgroups in the group are characterized by various adaptive properties regarding a newcomer. While joining a group a newcomer is actually involved in one of the subgroups that is in large “open” for him or is not involved in any subgroup (subgroups are either “closed” or membership in them is not urgent). Specific adaptation is characteristic for those group members who tend to be simultaneously involved in several subgroups.

***External group interaction and subgroup openness.*** Intensification of group interaction with environment fosters strengthening intergroup boundaries and concurrently openness of informal groups, but limitation of ties with environment determines closeness of informal subgroups.

## **CONCLUSION**

Informal subgroups in small groups and some aspects of phenomena manifestations such as cohesiveness, compatibility identification, reference, contradictions, adaptation, status, and also some issues of subgroup dynamics were subject to empirical study.

The theory under consideration proposes its further development. A great deal of efforts should be applied to verify experimentally and substantiate a set of emphasized positions of microgroup theory and to formulate new positions as well. One can identify several weighty trends for carrying out further investigations:

- To find out details of psychological mechanism of establishing informal subgroups regarding motivation, comparison, categorization, and identification.

- To study carefully functions of subgroup different types, especially with respect to the group that is of primary importance for optimization of group performance effectiveness.
- To determine impact tendencies of subgroups of various types on their members and on the group as a whole; to that it is necessary to draw attention to depth and stability of influence not only within the group boundaries, but in the broader social context.
- To study microgroup identity, microgroup reference, microgroup conflict.
- To ascertain what contradiction types, at what level of their manifestation, in what structural group components, evoke these or other tendencies of integration and disintegration processes; it is important to consider not only separate contradictions, but compositions of different contradictions as well.
- To consider in detail all noted peculiarities of integration–disintegration processes within subgroups, between subgroups, between subgroups and “self-dependent” members, between group and environment in the dynamic interrelationship of these levels of group activity.
- To verify an opportunity of applying a theory to an analysis of group phenomena that have not been examined as yet

The project of further investigation on the identified trends appears to be rather extensive without taking into account a number of particular issues. To verify some positions and solve concrete tasks one should use specially designed experiments that must be carried out with natural groups and subgroups applying at most true-to-life tasks rather than artificial ones.

Microgroup theory under consideration provides a large-scope field for further investigations of small group and we hope it will arise interest and response among specialists.

### **The Literature**

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