



## HOW NEWCOMERS INFLUENCE GROUP MICROCLIMATE?

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the multifaceted role of group composition and the influence of newcomers on group performance and dynamics. Group composition - including diversity in skills, traits, and backgrounds - significantly affects group processes such as cohesion, communication, and decision-making. While stability fosters trust and shared memory systems, controlled turnover can inject valuable perspectives and increase adaptability. Newcomers exert both unconscious and conscious influence. Unconsciously, their arrival can reshape group norms even before formal integration, while conscious influence depends on their motivation and the group's openness to change. Newcomers can positively stimulate creativity and group reflection, yet they may also disrupt harmony and demand increased resources for integration. The outcome of their influence is largely shaped by how well existing members manage receptivity and adapt to change. Thus, strategically managing group composition and supporting newcomer integration is essential to optimizing team functionality

**Keywords:** newcomers, group, members, team functionality, microclimate.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Many previous studies focus on the process of newcomers' adaptation, socialization, and adjustment to the group they have joined (Houghton, 2014; Lee, 2024; Yu et al., 2025, etc.), but the changes in a group caused by newcomers are analysed less commonly. Meanwhile, this topic is becoming extremely relevant in the modern world, when various activities are increasingly being organised in the form of projects, and relatively small work groups are prevalent even in larger organisations.

Project and/or work groups are created to achieve greater efficiency than individuals can achieve. Consisting of a few or more individuals, work groups accumulate more resources (e.g. knowledge and skills) and can use these resources productively (e.g. group members can

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exchange information, coordinate their actions, motivate each other). Group members have a common goal and are dependent on each other both in terms of the actions that need to be taken to achieve the goal and the results (whether positive or negative) (Larson, 2010).

However, the problems of inefficiency can arise if group members are not sufficiently cohesive, if they are unable to adapt quickly and creatively to changing circumstances. In this case, new group members can become a potentially valuable resource since they can influence the cognition and behaviour of the existing group members both directly and indirectly.

**The major purpose** of this article is to analyse what influence newcomers can have on the group microclimate. The research is based on the method of *comparative literature analysis*.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Group composition and membership changes

The term “group composition” refers to the characteristics of a certain group in terms of the group members’ abilities, achievement levels, opinions, personal traits, age, gender, ethnicity, etc. In other words, group composition is defined as a combination of the number of individuals in a group and their personal characteristics (Levine et al., 2019). Group composition is important because it shows how the characteristics of individual group members can affect group cohesion and compatibility (Fern, 2011). The diversity of group members can positively or negatively influence the processes in the group and the results achieved through cooperation, coordination of actions, cohesion, quality of decisions, etc. For instance, Fern (2011) found that the amount and quality of personally relevant information which tends to be disclosed in the group is directly affected by the number of male and female in this group. A higher degree of disclosure of personal information correlates with the degree of acquaintanceship among group members (Fern, 2011), and with a higher degree of acquaintanceship, one can expect greater predictability of group members' behaviour/actions.

Levine et al. (2019) and Hackman & Katz (2010) provide evidence that group stability is beneficial to group performance. According to Hackman & Katz (2010), the belief that a group without change cannot survive for long is a myth; on the contrary, stable groups tend to have healthier dynamics than those with constant newcomers since stability contributes to creating transactive memory systems within the group, as well as a sufficiently high degree of trust among group members.

Nevertheless, a group is not a static body. Any group is characterised by membership changes, which, according to Levine et al. (2019), are stimulated by the qualitative change of existing group members due to the experience they acquire, and the arrival of new members. Thus, membership turnover may bring benefits that outweigh the benefits of group stability.

Group composition and membership changes are important factors that significantly influence group performance and functioning. Research shows that group composition - which includes members’ skills, achievements, opinions, personal traits, age, gender, ethnicity, and more - can have both positive and negative effects on group dynamics and outcomes. For instance, Li (2021) found that increasing group diversity can help reduce performance decline in complex task environments by promoting better information processing and group adaptability. However, Rink & Ellemers (2015) emphasize that unstable group composition can cause self-evaluation issues, reduce the acceptance of new members, and hinder group performance. Additionally, Bedwell (2019) discusses that the impact of membership changes depends on how quickly a group can adapt and develop shared knowledge structures, known as team mental models (TMMs), which are crucial for effective adjustment and group

performance. Therefore, managing group composition and membership turnover requires carefully balancing the benefits of diversity with the potential challenges in order to optimize group functioning and achieve the best possible outcomes

## 2.2. Unconscious and conscious influence of newcomers

Levine et al. (2019) confirm that newcomers have the potential to consciously or unconsciously influence a group's microclimate and performance.

In the case of *unconscious influence*, the very arrival and presence of a newcomer in the group causes certain changes without the newcomer having any prior intention to initiate these changes. The changes in the group are largely determined by how existing group members relate to the newcomer or to each other. Unconscious influence can occur even before the newcomer actually appears in the group, since the old members of the group may have certain expectations regarding the newcomer. For example, the old members of the group usually expect that they will have and will be able to pass on the group's values, customs, etc. to the newcomer. In the process of transferring the values, it may turn out that some of the group's values are unstable, but the old members did not notice this before. This can encourage the old members to change the previous group culture. If the values in the group are stable, the previous socialization methods may change in the process of transferring them to the newcomer, especially if it turns out that transferring the values and knowledge in the customary ways is difficult. Also, it can become important to demonstrate that one actually believes what is being said, that the information conveyed to the newcomer reflects the content of the message as accurately as possible. Furthermore, the motivation of group veterans to socialize a group newcomer can enhance their own socialization abilities, especially if they have not had such experience before.

The group's adaptation to a newcomer also means monitoring the newcomer and encouraging his/her contribution to the group activities. If not one but several newcomers come to the group, then the more newcomers are there, the more efforts and investment the group's old-timers need to monitor newcomers' activities, adjust them, and direct them in the desired direction. Both individual and institutional tactics can be used for this purpose. It is noteworthy that if a newcomer is able to properly perform one's role, fulfil the obligations assigned, and adjust the behaviour/work to the guidelines provided by the group's old-timers, this newcomer will need less supervision. Conversely, newcomers who cannot cope with tasks and obligations will require more resources for monitoring, which may result in old-timers having less time to perform their duties. Here, the similarities in the demographic, personal and other characteristics of newcomer(s) to the analogous characteristics of old-timers play a significant role: more similarities mean greater motivation for integration on both sides.

Newcomers can also unconsciously change the relationships between group members. For example, if the attitude toward a newcomer in the group is negative (let us say, the newcomer is very active in trying to change the established traditions), this can raise the cohesion between the group old-timers. In the groups characterised by division, a newcomer can increase the power of one segment of the group over another segment, thereby increasing the likelihood of conflict and reducing group cohesion.

In order to *consciously* influence the group, newcomers introduce new ideas that aim to improve the processes in the group and/or achieve better results. Levine et al. (2019) examine small work/task groups and discuss the factors related to both newcomers, veterans, and the group as a whole, since these factors can influence the perceived opportunities/threats of the ideas communicated by a newcomer from the perspective of the veterans, which will determine whether these ideas will be accepted or rejected. The authors argue that the major factor of

conscious influence is a newcomer's motivation to propose new ideas, and this motivation must be consistent with the readiness of the group's veterans to listen to and accept these ideas.

Newcomers can intentionally shape group dynamics and performance by introducing new ideas and perspectives. Levine & Choi (2004) highlight that such conscious influence arises when newcomers actively seek to alter the group's structure, dynamics, or performance. This process involves a negotiation between newcomers and established members, where innovation occurs if newcomers present new ideas for improving team performance and old-timers accept and implement these ideas. The success of this influence depends on factors such as the newcomer's motivation to introduce new ideas, their ability to generate such ideas, and their success in convincing old-timers to adopt them.

Research by Hornsey et al. (2007) further explores how newcomers' criticisms and suggestions are received by established group members. Their studies reveal that groups often resist change proposed by newcomers, viewing their criticisms as less constructive and their suggestions as less agreeable compared to those from long-standing members. However, this resistance can be mitigated if newcomers demonstrate commitment to the group, such as distancing themselves from previous affiliations, thereby increasing the perceived legitimacy of their suggestions.

Additionally, the manner in which newcomers present their ideas can influence their acceptance. Using inclusive language that emphasizes group identity, such as plural pronouns ("we," "our"), can enhance the likelihood of their ideas being embraced by the group. In contrast, focusing on personal identity with singular pronouns ("I," "my") may hinder acceptance, as it can be perceived as highlighting differences rather than fostering group cohesion (Levine & Choi, 2011).

These findings underscore the importance of both the newcomer's approach and the group's receptiveness in determining the impact of conscious influence on group dynamics. Effective integration and acceptance of newcomers' contributions require strategic communication, alignment with group values, and a willingness from established members to embrace change.

### **3. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF NEWCOMERS ON GROUPS**

Newcomers can significantly impact group dynamics, both positively and negatively. Their presence often leads to increased creativity and reflection within the group, but can also introduce challenges that may affect group cohesion and performance.

Choi & Thompson (2005) found that groups that have experienced changes in their members are better at generating ideas. Furthermore, the creativity of newcomers can stimulate the creativity of the entire group. Rink et al. (2013) analyse team receptivity to newcomers, i.e. they focus on how teams adapt to newcomers. The authors review previous empirical studies which examine the changes in three components of team receptivity - team reflection, team knowledge utilization, and newcomer acceptance - when a newcomer joins a team. To identify the relationship between these three components of team receptivity and the characteristics of old-timers and newcomers in a group, they present a conceptual multilevel model that highlights which characteristics contribute to improving team receptivity. After conducting the empirical research, the authors found that team receptivity to newcomers can have a positive effect on sustained team performance, but only if team reflection and team knowledge utilization coincide with the newcomer acceptance process.

Hackman & Katz (2010) confirm that stable groups are not open to new perspectives, and that changes in existing habits and routines in response to new circumstances may entail higher transformation costs. Thus, the arrival of newcomers creates favourable circumstances for the insight and acceptance of new perspectives, and can reduce the costs of transformations required to complete group tasks.

Research indicates that groups experiencing changes in membership, such as the introduction of newcomers, tend to generate more original ideas. For instance, Choi & Thompson (2005) found that groups with new members were more creative, as the newcomers' fresh perspectives prompted existing members to reconsider established ideas and practices. Similarly, Wu et al. (2022) suggest that the uncertainty and disruption caused by membership changes can trigger reflection among group members, leading to increased epistemic motivation and the generation of both incremental and radical new ideas.

Despite the potential benefits, newcomers can also pose challenges to group dynamics. Hackman & Katz (2010) argue that stable groups may become resistant to new perspectives, and the introduction of newcomers can disrupt established routines and increase transformation costs. This resistance can hinder the group's ability to adapt to new circumstances and may lead to conflicts or decreased cohesion.

Furthermore, the integration of newcomers requires significant effort from existing members to monitor and guide the new entrants. If newcomers struggle to meet expectations or adapt to group norms, the additional resources required for their integration can detract from the group's overall performance. The degree of similarity between newcomers and existing members can influence this process; greater similarities may facilitate smoother integration, while differences can pose challenges.

In summary, while newcomers can bring valuable perspectives and stimulate innovation within groups, their integration must be managed carefully. Ensuring alignment between team reflection, knowledge utilization, and newcomer acceptance is crucial for harnessing the positive potential of newcomers and mitigating the risks associated with their integration.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Group composition, which includes the individual characteristics and diversity of members, plays a critical role in shaping group cohesion, communication, and decision-making outcomes. While stability within groups fosters trust and the development of transactive memory systems that support efficient collaboration, strategic membership turnover can introduce fresh perspectives that enhance adaptability and innovation. However, to fully leverage the benefits of diversity and new ideas, it is essential to manage group composition carefully - balancing the opportunities brought by change with the potential challenges of integration and maintaining group cohesion.

Newcomers can begin to unconsciously influence group dynamics even before their formal entry, as their anticipated presence may prompt shifts in group norms and values based on existing members' expectations. When newcomers attempt to exert conscious influence, their impact is most effective when their ideas align with the group's identity and are communicated in an inclusive, collaborative manner. Ultimately, the success of a newcomer's influence depends on both the openness of veteran group members and the newcomer's strategy for integration, as these factors jointly determine whether their contributions will be accepted or met with resistance.

Newcomers can boost group creativity and innovation by challenging existing routines, but their successful integration relies on team receptivity, which is influenced by shared reflection, effective knowledge exchange, and mutual acceptance.

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