

# **SOCI 324**

# **GROUPS, ORGANISATIONS AND**

# **THE INDIVIDUAL**

## **Session 7 – Social Influence-Loafing**

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# Session Overview

- Suppose you and a group of others are to perform a number of chores such as clean this room, pack chairs, push a vehicle to start it etc; will all the people exert equal effort? Most probably not! Some will bear down and take as much of the load as possible, while others will simply hang on, appearing to help without really doing much. Hangers on or people who leave most of the task to others while they pretend to be working are often found in groups.
- The phenomenon is called social loafing. Several researches indicate the existence and occurrence of social loafing in group settings. Latane et al (1979), in one such classic experiments asked a groups of male students to cheer and clap as loudly as they can to determine how much noise people make in social settings. The subjects were made to engage in this task alone and then together with others in groups of two, four, six eight etc.
- The results indicated that the level of energy that each subject gave reduced as group size increased. Again the energy used to clap in a group setting was far less that than the energy expended when individuals were asked to clap alone.

# Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Definition of Social Loafing
- Reasons for the incidence of loafing
- The Implications of Social Loafing
- Measures to control/prevent the occurrence of loafing
- Sample Question
- Session Summary
- References

# Reading List

- Read Chapter 11 of the required text and the article on this session posted on Sakai
- Read chapter 12 of the third reference/textbook listed at the end of this session.



Topic One

# DEFINING SOCIAL LOAFING



# What is Social Loafing?

- Social loafing refers to group induced reduction in individual output when performer's efforts are pooled and thus cannot be individually judged.
- Again, loafing can be said to be the tendency of group members to exert less effort on a task than they would if working on it alone. It is a practice very common with additive tasks where everybody's contribution is added for the group's final product.
- Gilovich et al, 2016 define loafing as ' the tendency to exert less effort on a group task in which individual contributions cannot be monitored.
- Social loafing is general in scope, occurring in both sexes, in several different cultures, and in different and diverse work conditions. It occurs with cognitive tasks (e.g a quiz) as well as to tasks involving physical effort (e.g. tug of war) and for simple as well as complex



Topic Two

# THE INCIDENCE OF LOAFING



# The Incidence of Loafing

- The inability to evaluate one's performance (either individually or collectively) is one main cause of social loafing. This happens because the individual's output is lost in the crowd and is not easily identifiable. In other words when it becomes difficult or almost impossible to identify the contributions of each individual member, social loafing is very likely to occur.
- Another factor responsible for loafing is the diffusion of responsibility, that is the belief that the presence of other people in a situation makes one less personally responsible for the events that occur in that situation. In other words no one member takes full responsibility for the group's final product or output. Because of this group members tend to think "why should I 'kill' myself, after all we all take the praise or blame for the final output?".





# The incidence of Loafing-Cultural Orientation

- The general outcome, when people think they are being taken for a ride, or been victims of social loafing is to express anger and ultimately withdraw from the group. The question however is whether this applies to people of various cultural orientations. Would people from different cultural backgrounds react to social loafing in the same manner?
- It is suggested that in cultures where the orientation is more 'individualistic', there is a strong belief that rewards should reflect performance. Thus the more you work the more rewards you should get. In others where the orientation is 'collectivistic' – the belief is that individuals should receive equal rewards (no matter how much effort exerted) in order to maintain group harmony.
- Based on these then, in individualistic societies, (e.g. the United States) people will readily withdraw from a group where there is loafing than people from a collectivistic background like (Japan, Ghana) would.

Topic Three

# THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIAL LOAFING



# The implications of Loafing

- The suggestion that most people will ‘goof off’ or engage in social loafing when working with others is quite troubling since many important tasks are done within groups. The implications of this on task performance are quite obvious.
- Social loafing makes people do better on complex tasks but worse on simple tasks when they are in the presence of others and their individual contributions cannot be evaluated.



Topic Four

# CONTROLLING SOCIAL LOAFING



# Controlling Social Loafing

- There should be the provision of conditions that provide individuals with an opportunity to evaluate their own contribution or the contributions of the entire group, relative to those of other groups or individuals.
- The most obvious involves making the output or effort of each participant readily identifiable. This could be done by sharing the task amongst group members. This way, the exact input of each person becomes visible and can be measured. The tendency to goof off will then be checked.
- Letting participant believe that their individual output is being monitored and measured.



# Controlling Social Loafing

- Providing the potential for evaluation, not necessarily by others; it could be self evaluation. Group members can be made aware of past records or scores obtained for a task. Providing group members with a standard against which to assess themselves may be enough to prevent loafing. This is because people want to look good in their own eyes and in that of others.
- Social Ostracism is another method that can be used to control loafing. This involves shunning or ostracizing loafers until they conform to group norms. However research indicates that the effectiveness of ostracism is different for males and females. Whilst females felt the rejection and worked hard to get back into the group when given the opportunity, males did not. Rather males redirected their interests to other things and hid their emotions, reinterpreting their situation (ostracism) as one of personal choice (own decision to leave the group) rather than something imposed on them.
- Therefore the use of this approach must be used with caution with due considerations for gender.

# Controlling Social Loafing

- Social loafing can also be reduced by increasing group members commitment to successful task performance.
- The pressure to work hard (high standard of norms in groups) may check loafing. Thus, individual output may actually increase rather than decrease as group size increases as people tend to have more committed people to look up to and who challenge them.

# Sample Question





# Session Summary

- It is clear from this session that we have all engaged in loafing or been victims of loafers at various points in our life and in different group settings.
- Most likely we did not like it when other members of a group to which we belong loafed. It is important to know about the presence and effects of social loafing in order to prevent its interference with group performance.
- The findings on loafing have several implications on how groups should be organized. If you are a leader or a manager who want the best from employees, it is important to place employees in groups only where their individual contributions to the groups output can be assessed.

# References

- Robert, B. and Branscombe, N. (2012). Social Psychology. 13<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2007) Social Psychology. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson Education Inc.
- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. & Akert, R. (2010) Social Psychology. 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Pearson Education Inc.

