

Groups – Formal, Informal, Peer, Interest, Pressure Groups

CHARACTERISTIC	FORMAL	INFORMAL
<i>Structure</i>	Clear structure and hierarchy, status, roles and lines of authority, including an elected or appointed leader.	No clear structure, possibly with an unofficial leader. Operates on personal relationships of members.
<i>Common goals</i>	Clearly defined and lasting goals or purposes.	Goals or purposes change with time and type of activity.
<i>Rules</i>	Written rules with sanctions.	No written rules.
<i>Membership</i>	Set requirements for joining, and members need to formally leave.	No requirements for joining, and members can simply leave.
<i>Marks of Identity</i>	There may be a uniform or dress code, set behaviour, a badge or symbol.	May develop a mode of dress or speech.
<i>Common needs, interests, values</i>	Exists to protect its members' interests or to meet external needs. Members' values are respected.	Exists to share interests and needs and offer support. Formed of individuals with common values.
<i>Interaction determined by rules and regulations</i>	Contact and interaction between members may be formalised and limited.	Interaction between all members is unstructured and open.
<i>Established patterns of behaviour</i>	Often laid down in writing and outlining behaviour expected of members, both within the group and when dealing with others.	Patterns may develop and become established but not recorded.
<i>Cooperation to achieve group goals</i>	Cooperation required of members.	Cooperation a product of personal relationships not a formal requirement.
<i>Sanctions</i>	Formally laid down as part of rules and regulations.	Informally developed within the group.

Table 2.2.2 Informal and formal groups

Peer Groups

A **peer group** is made up of people of a similar age who share a similar social status and have similar experiences, interests and values. People might be friends with their peers, but a peer group does not always consist of friends. **Peer pressure** is the influence a peer group places on an individual to conform to the values and behaviour of the group. Children and adolescents are often said to be very vulnerable to peer pressure.

Interest groups

An interest group is a group of individuals who share an interest. The group may exist to protect the interests of its members and, when this is the case, it might be involved in activities that are intended to influence public opinion or policy. National associations of hotel owners, farmers or manufacturers are examples of such groups.

Pressure groups

Pressure groups seek to influence public opinion or policy and are usually involved with issues that affect people outside their membership. For example, a group may form to protest about a major road development that will destroy an area of unspoilt natural beauty.

Key points

1. A social group is a number of people who personally interact frequently, according to an established set of norms, in order to meet shared needs.
2. Social groups can be primary or secondary, informal or formal.
3. Social groups can be classified according to the closeness of the members.
4. A formal group has a formally organised internal structure.