

# Engaging Faculty in Group-Level Change for Institutional Transformation

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**Disrupting Inequity and Building Inclusive Academic Departments**

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## Chapter 2

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**Group Psycho-Emotional Dynamics as Central to Effective Institutional Change: Connecting Individual and Whole-Institution Approaches**

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## 2 Group Psycho-Emotional Dynamics as Central to Effective Institutional Change

### Connecting Individual and Whole-Institution Approaches

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**Problem Statement:** Our theory of change puts group-affective dynamics at the center and emphasizes groups dealing with their processes in dialogue as a group. In this chapter, we define what we mean by group PED and illustrate how it functions as the core of our group-focused theory of change.

**Primary Voices:** At this point in our writing, we have to acknowledge a tension between our ideals and the actuality of lived experience for many within groups. Namely, power differentials result in members of historically marginalized communities bearing the brunt of group-level inequities. Our team is majority White, and the perspective of White team members is limited by this experience of being White and the accordant privileging of whiteness, especially in terms of whose accounts are given credence in group interactions. Our White team members may experience being the other through various aspects of our identities—difficulties navigating our campus when our bodies either temporarily or permanently depart from the assumed norm of how folks move through space, sexualities, and gender identities that also differ from what has been assumed to be the norm, the needs of elder parents, children or other dependents that lengthen or shorten our work days and so on. Although these experiences impact our group-level interactions, the experience is different from being the only Black person in a group, as is the normal experience of our team’s Black members and their insights guide our reflection here. One thing that all members of our group share is idealism (we have been described by those we facilitate as “relentlessly positive”) and in this chapter, we attempt to temper the idealism of our belief in the power of the group, with the reality of the inequities and injustices experienced daily by many of those group members.

When group members, including within-unit leaders (formal or informal) stand up for group members' efforts and successes, welcome accountability and practice forgiveness, and reward (again, formally and informally) meaningful diversity and inclusion accomplishments over superficial ones, the group serves both the individual and the institution. Because of this the group is the focal point of WVU ADVANCE's efforts. Groups are the mechanisms to activate, propel, and most importantly sustain practices throughout institutions (Fine, 2012; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Ray, 2019).

A group is "[...] an aggregation of persons that is characterized by shared place, common identity, collective culture, and social relations" (Fine, 2012, p. 160). For our specific purposes, these include organizational groups, such as academic departments, colleges, programs, as well as disciplinary groupings linked by professional affiliations. Groups can be structured around attitudinal affiliation (e.g., change agents, change-resistors, advocates for diversity, equity, and inclusion) or by identity. Additional groups are functional, for example, a college or university curriculum or promotion and tenure committee. These units facilitate communication about and implementation of institutional policies, as well as individual faculty contribution to the function of academe. For this reason, we argue that most change by daily interactions and punctuated, purposeful actions occurs at the group level. In addition to getting the business of the academy done, these groups also provide an opportunity to build strong affective ties among the individual members of institutions. Groups provide the perfect focal point for igniting social justice and maintaining it institution wide (Centola, 2021).

We argued in the last chapter that a majority of current change efforts target either institutional-level factors or individual attitudes directly; further they emphasize cognition and skills, while neglecting affect. This chapter will describe how to add group cognitive, skills and, especially, affective process to change strategies. To do so, we use work in the social sciences and humanities which focuses on human agency and group "atmosphere" as central components (Clough & Halley, 2007). Like the weather, an atmosphere is a feeling, mood, or vibe that exceeds the individual body of a conscious subject and pertains to the overall collective in which individuals are located. Atmosphere affects all who enter, such as what happens when walking into a quiet park located off of a busy city street. We use the term affect to mean the human capacity to *have an effect* both in changing institutional structures and on felt body feelings and emotions that exist in work units and other groups. We define affective interventions as those relating to a group, work unit, or department atmosphere. Connecting individuals to groups through positive affective ties increases the group's capacity for cooperation, trust, and interdependent interactions (Lawler et al., 2009). We argue that individuals build and sustain capacity for change through engaging with

groups and that they also feel the impact of inequities within group contexts. The ideal group process creates the positive affective atmosphere to support change and generates a group identity in which belonging means that individuals continue to engage. In other words, the positive affective or emotional climate also makes people want to engage—interactions with the group generate positive emotions and people want to continue to feel and experience them (Lawler et al., 2009).

Key to this is the concept of interdependence. It is easy to understand group members as taking on a role for some specific purpose, leading to thinking of interdependence as interacting parts. It is more difficult to see how the group manifests within each person. To do this, we use the concept of department atmosphere, which is the affect or feeling in the group that is created through the interaction of all members. Everyday interactions are seemingly simple but utterly powerful in generating positive or negative feelings and behavioral tendencies.

Yet, systemic injustices and inequities are disproportionately born by group members from historically marginalized communities. The common failure to recognize that injustice for one person or subgroup is problematic for the whole group stems from the inability to recognize the atmosphere and its profound effect on each person in the group as well as the success of the group as a whole. We argue that the group atmosphere has a penetrating and profound effect on each person in the group. When some group members are excluded, marginalized, or harmed, no one in the group (classroom, courtroom, neighborhood, or academic department) can escape the negative atmosphere these injustices create. The atmosphere is a product of the whole and not the experience of an individual. Social psychologists are likely to argue that injustices for one person—or an entire outgroup—often make members of the majority or in-group feel superior. Discrimination, from this point of view, has a psychologically positive effect for the offender. However, our approach to group atmosphere refers to the psychology of the whole rather than the effect of the group on individuals. Even if discrimination makes members of the majority group feel superior, the group affect or atmosphere is still full of frustration and conflict. In this version of societal psychology, we shift away from the usual social psychological focus on how groups affect individuals. Instead, we are focusing on the psychology of the group-as-a whole, including shared feelings, cognitions, and behavioral tendencies (Himmelweit & Gaskell, 1990).

We define group capacity as how effectively an academic department, unit, cross-disciplinary group can understand, convey, and integrate equity and justice-promoting tenets in their daily practice and organizational culture. Our theoretical conceptualization of interdependent, high-functioning equity, and justice-promoting academic departments or other groups is not the typical way that these entities conceptualize

themselves, unless they have a mission specific to diversity, equity, justice, or inclusion. It is more common for faculty or staff to think about their academic department or unit as an bureaucratic or disciplinary unit. When academic departments work interdependently to make decisions about course offerings, curriculum, program admission criteria, and hiring, they are functioning as a group. *But, what does it mean for the same departments to function as high-functioning equity and justice-promoting groups?* Our work centers on helping academic entities understand and integrate into their daily practice the group-level processes that will transform them into high-functioning equity and justice-promoting groups. A pre-requisite step to accomplishing this objective requires understanding groups as complex meso-level organizations which tend to reproduce the power differentials and structural inequalities that characterize the larger institution. The group-level processes we propose are effective in great part because of our attention to academic group complexities and our application of an intersectional lens to better understand the implications of group composition and group capacity on group function, as well as the design and delivery of our interventions.

### **Intersectionality and Groups**

Like gendered organizations theorists (Acker, 1990; Britton, 2000; Kanter, 1977), we interrogate the assumed neutrality (as well as universality and objectivity) of academic characteristics and organizational processes and outcomes (Bird, 2011). We agree it normalizes masculinized academic standards for of behaving, succeeding, and leading and thus advantages “male” lives (Bystydzienski & Bird, 2006; Eveline, 1994; Krefling, 2003; Park, 1996). This reality clarifies why an intersectional lens is required to not only understand groups but also to constructively engage them in transforming group processes. Intersectionality’s value here is due to its “attentiveness to power relations and social inequalities” and “the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (Collins, 2015, pp. 1–2).

In light of its foremost objective (attentiveness to power and social inequalities), we apply an intersectional lens to academic group composition, capacity, and the ways our intersectional “analytic sensibility” (Collins, 2015, p. 11) shape the design and delivery of our equity and justice-promoting interventions. Once we have identified a group to work with, our next point of inquiry is about the group’s composition or demographics. Even the most seemingly homogenous groups are inherently diverse as they are made up of individuals with distinguishable characteristics and affiliations. These characteristics and affiliations are

rarely inconsequential within the hierarchies of organizational life. As scholar practitioners, then, it is critical for us to know how a group is constituted—to ask “Is the group all or mostly made up of individuals with majority group identities (which is almost always the case at our institution)?” “What are the power differentials among group members?” More specifically, “who are the most and least organizationally powerful individuals in the group?” Subsequent considerations for our team include “given what we know about the group’s composition, are there ways we need to adapt the order or structure of our intervention, so that we simultaneously ensure the safety of vulnerable group members, while creating meaningful opportunities to amplify their voices and interests?” Also, “Given what we know about the group’s composition which combination of our facilitators would be the ideal team to work with the group?”

It is essential that we name or “visibilize” (see Chapter 1) the overwhelming whiteness of the groups we most often serve (as well as the overwhelming whiteness of our own WVU ADVANCE Team). To ignore or unname “whiteness” is to as Ray (2019) puts it “... help launder racial domination by obscuring or legitimating unequal processes” (p. 35). In her essay on the Phenomenology of Whiteness, Ahmed (2007) asserts that “spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that inhabit them” (p.). Rather than literal body shapes, however, Ahmed, refers here to the characteristics and dispositions of whiteness as an interlocking system of domination. Cabrera (2019) highlights three central themes in the discourse of whiteness in Critical Whiteness Studies. These include an unwillingness to name the contours of systemic racism, avoidance of identifying with a racial experience, or minority group, and minimization of the US history of racism. Gusa (2010) asserts that whiteness informs the racial climate and culture of colleges and universities. As Cabrera (2019) points out, visibilizing whiteness can provoke a defensive reaction (e.g., claims of reverse discrimination). That “defensive reaction” often has direct implications on all or mostly White groups’ receptiveness to equity and justice-promoting interventions. Moderating variables, in these contexts, however, may be a group’s subject knowledge of whiteness as an oppressive structure and/or group members’ insights given their own intersecting-marginalized identities (e.g., being a woman or nonbinary, being queer, being from an economically disadvantaged background). As we discuss in Chapter 3, the whiteness and (or) “mainstreamness” of the predominantly White and often predominantly male academic departments we targeted informed our early decisions about the design, focal points, and delivery of our Dialogues™ Intervention. This was also complicated by the experiences of international faculty, whose understandings of race and racialization differ from those assumed to be universal in the context of the US.

## **Psycho-Emotional Dynamics and the Department Atmosphere**

Department-level interventions are recognized as complex and fraught sites to work for equity and justice, especially in places that lack diversity; such interventions require high relational skills and copious time and are “not for the faint of heart” (Laursen & Austin, 2020, p. 98). In our NSF ADVANCE IT award, we focused first on the academic department because it is the space where faculty spend most of their time and is therefore critical for successful faculty professional development and retention. Departments serve a central role in the mission of academia as a knowledge-producing system. Academic departments come from the disciplines organized to seek knowledge; and sometimes this means that faculty within them are more oriented toward pursuing their discipline-based knowledge than to understand the institution or higher education as a whole (unless they reside in disciplines that study these directly). Academic departments also provide the structure through which faculty interact with the larger institution. The academic units (e.g., groups) are themselves a community of practice, a learning community with a shared purpose or function. However, the reality in many academic institutions is that there is a tension between individual academic focus (“me the researcher, teacher”) and the often unrecognized reality of interdependence in which each scholar only succeeds because of the support of the group. For example, some members of the department do the service and teach the courses so others have more time for research, and research demonstrates that the service burden and especially the work to diversify the academy are inequitably borne by members of historically marginalized groups, a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bird et al., 2004; Mickey et al., 2022).

Our goal in addressing departments’ PED and its effect on department atmosphere is to create a recognition and embodied feeling of the interdependence that already exists, but is not often acknowledged, in all academic departments. To do so, we intentionally focus on the internal processes that create an atmosphere. Atmospheres are co-created. Because of this feelings and emotions are not just private mental states within a person and “a group of bodies comes to exist as a felt collective” through the co-creation of a shared atmosphere (Riedel, 2019, p. 85). Changing them requires that group members see and discuss their contribution to them and the effect they have on everyone. In this way, atmospheres can be deliberately changed in ways that welcome difference, invite diversity, promote new ideas, forgive past transgression, and promotes an environment of healing and well-being for everyone.

Individual actions, experiences, and cognitions matter, of course, and are part of the atmosphere that is our proposed focal point for change. For instance, in addition to being manifestations of systemic inequality



and social injustice, microaggressions are forces within (and forces informed by) the affective dynamics of the unit. Faculty also bring histories of their own treatment and mistreatment, disciplinary conflict, fears, and stress about the future of both the academy and their own jobs to department-level interactions. Conflict over the direction of the curriculum, for instance, might actually stand in for, distract from, and/or cover conflict between individuals of a more personal and emotional nature. Added to this is the fact that faculty are trained to conduct research and scholarship, often independently and with the confidence that their disciplinary focus and methodologies are critically important; they may lack training to achieve administrative tasks, including moving toward diversity and inclusion metrics to meet equity and justice goals, as a group.

Departments are as linked to systemic workings as they are to the workings of individual department members. In the crucible of the academic department, larger structural forces appear. Each of us as members of the faculty enters this place having internalized structured hierarchies, forms of status/capital, the logic of higher education in this political economy, and ideas about race, gender, and ethnicity that tend to justify or refute an unjust status quo. As in all areas of society, people in academia harbor both conscious and unconscious biases which inhibit change. Academic departments are often divided in the same way, and along the same fault lines, as other groups in society.

In regard to change itself, social psychologists have long argued that collective habits are very difficult to change; typically, only very small variations in behaviors occur without some major intervention in the social field (Lewin, 1997). Within academia, specific forces act on individuals, locking attitudes, and behaviors in place. These forces include the autonomy and competitiveness of academia, the demands of the tenure and promotion process, the focus on individual (rather than collective) achievement, a focus on product (i.e., publications, grants, etc.) over process, and disciplinary centrism. While collegiality, mutual respect, and equality have long been the ideals in participating in the decision-making process in academia, notions of success remain individualistic (Kezar, 2013). And as many scholars have found the assumptions embedded in this meritocratic and neoliberal system act as a significant barrier to achieving transformation (Bird, 2011; Bird & Rhoton, 2021; Hughes et al., 2022; Mickey et al., 2022; Morimoto & Zajicek, 2014; Rhoton, 2011).

### **Impacts of Decision-Making and Information-Sharing Processes on Department Climate**

We intend our interventions to scaffold faculty behaviors that lead to cultures in which processes and practices sustain equitable access to social capital. Thus, it is important to consider the specific components



of department-level climate that affect work group processes, especially information-sharing and decision-making practices.

Interventions should address ostracism and exclusion as well as incivility. The former includes information, group, and language exclusion; the latter is rudeness and disrespect. Both are associated with a host of negative personal and work-related outcomes. These vary in their impacts across groups and may be experienced more frequently by some groups. For example, chilly interpersonal climates negatively impact the experiences of women faculty in STEM and result in negative outcomes for organizations and disciplines (see Miner et al., 2018 for a review of studies demonstrating this). Early career women faculty experienced more ostracism and incivility from male colleagues than men did, and suffered outcomes such as increased psychological distress and lower self-efficacy as a result (Miner et al., 2018). Zimmerman et al. (2016) examined workplace ostracism and information sharing among STEM faculty, examining the impacts of race and sex of the respondents, and the sex distribution of their work units. Women reported more experiences of workplace ostracism than men; this discrepancy appeared regardless of the number of women in their department. Information sharing did not differ between men and women. Both male and female faculty of color reported being out of the loop in terms of receiving information. Collectively, these findings indicate that for women faculty of color, the negative impacts could be especially strong. Further research indicates that impact depends on whether or not the information is necessary to task performance. A person can suffer information exclusion without experiencing other forms of ostracism (Jones et al., 2009, 2011). If the excluded person is still able to participate in the task and sees that the exclusion was accidental, then they do not suffer the same negative impacts as if it was deliberate (Jones et al., 2009). However, in cases where the information is needed to complete the task, the recipient suffers negative outcomes regardless of whether the exclusion was deliberate or accidental (Jones et al., 2011).

Attending to group-affective interactions is a critical piece of building inclusive climates. Chung et al. (2020) looked at two aspects of work group inclusion: belongingness and uniqueness. Belongingness (e.g., identification with the team) has been shown to positively impact team performance; they examined how belongingness and uniqueness impacted the outcomes of full-time employees, including university faculty and staff. They found that, in addition to feeling that they belong, it is important for team members to feel valued for their uniqueness. Although they do not test this directly, they hypothesize that building this sense of appreciation for diversity among the entire team is a key foundation for developing inclusive work groups where underrepresented faculty members will be retained and suggest this as an area for future research. We return to this theme in Chapter 7 in our discussion

of cultivating change agent identities in academe and in Chapter 10 where we consider how different conceptions of inclusion, diversity, equity, and justice affect the potential application of our model.

Beyond the impacts on faculty as individuals, inclusive work group processes, especially effective information sharing, characterize high-performing teams—which for our purposes, we consider a subtype of group with a narrowly defined mission and more direct collaboration than that characterizing other groups—this might characterize a laboratory in a science department as opposed to the department as a whole. Hoogeboom and Wilderom (2020) examined the impacts of team behavioral patterns on team effectiveness. They found that relying on recurring patterns of interaction (e.g., scripted meetings with static formats) led to less effective teams. Instead, teams with non-recurring or mindful behaviors that are adaptive to the moment were most effective. Teams exhibiting participatory (e.g., collaborative) patterns were better at information sharing and, thus, most effective, especially for non-routine contexts where knowledge workers, like academic faculty, work. A study of a research-intensive medical school (Bland et al., 2005) confirmed a model of faculty research productivity that highlights the combined role of institutional, individual, and leadership factors. Relevant to this research, their data confirm the prediction that assertive-participatory institutional governance and leadership styles, especially at the chair level, support faculty research productivity. Assertive-participatory styles emphasize frequent meetings, active participation, effective feedback systems, and equitable sharing of information among faculty in a department (Bland et al., 2005). These practices, like many inclusive practices, build more effective and high-functioning teams overall, especially in the knowledge worker sphere (see Lin & Eichelberger, 2020).

For our purposes, we also consider impacts specific to achieving justice and equity. Dobbin et al. (2007) found that organizational-level changes that involved establishing responsibility and administrative structures were most effective at meeting affirmative action goals and promoting diversity; these structures enhanced the effectiveness of other programming such as mentoring and training in mitigating how gender bias impacts evaluations. Further, change efforts function most effectively through “networks of people, not through the actions of one individual, and through the alteration of ongoing operations, rather than the introduction of different actors playing the same roles” (Guinier & Minow, 2007, p. 269). The incongruous, gendered nature of the academic institution means that the unit level or department has a special power in implementing gendered practices, even when they contradict the stated goals of the institution as a whole (Bird, 2011). Thus, there is a critical need for effective mechanisms to assess where groups, especially academic departments, are in their engagement with diversity issues, apply the appropriate tools and motivation to help them move

forward, and effectively connect department-level processes with those at the administrative level.

### **The Specifics of Our Approach—Our Model and Its Accompanying Interventions**

According to the theory of social commitments (Lawler et al., 2009) if we can create repeated, positive interactions among faculty within their departments or home units, we increase the likelihood that individuals will “transform purely transactional ties into relational ties whereby the other and the relationships become the objects of value in themselves” (p. 19). A fundamental finding from sociology, psychology, and neuroscience shows that social interactions produce emotions (see reviews in Franks, 2006; Thoits, 1989; van Kleef, 2016, respectively). “People are affective beings who respond emotionally to their experiences in relationships, groups, and organizations” (Lawler et al., 2009, p. 50). If these affective experiences are negative, individuals will avoid future interactions with the perceived source of negativity. However, if these affective experiences are positive, individuals will want to continue to interact in order to feel those same positive emotions again. Positive affect promotes future, positive interactions (Lawler et al., 2009).

Modifying the climate of a department therefore modifies an individual’s social commitment to the group. *Social commitments* are group ties that involve “feelings and sentiments about the group or group affiliation and beliefs about the normative or moral properties of the group” (Lawler et al., 2009, p. 49). In other words, faculty members will value their connection to the group and their group identity will transcend the individual. Interactions with departmental colleagues will take on an intrinsic, expressive value wherein people believe in the group’s values and goals, value the overall well-being of the group, and see the group as an important source of their identity (Lawler et al., 2009). These characteristics should transform “chilly” or negative climates into positive spheres of interaction for all faculty groups and prompt the department as a whole to move toward diversity and inclusion outcomes and justice and equity goals together.

Our work adopts an assets-based, appreciative inquiry framework whereby departments are encouraged to collectively identify a positive direction in which to move and to adopt steps for moving in that direction. We remind readers that change is context dependent. The members of collectives—be they departments, committees, administrators, or interdisciplinary batches of faculty or graduate students—combine in such a way as to create a unique system. Like any system, its parts are non-summativ, with the mixing and mingling of individuals and subgroups forming something new because of their interactions. In both of the interventions described in this book—Dialogues™ and the Change

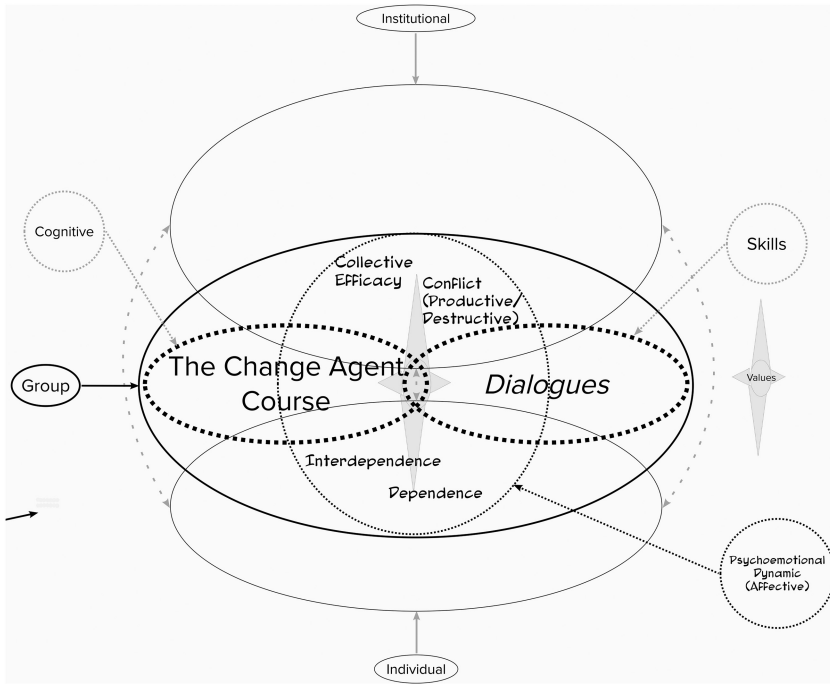


Figure 2.1 The Two Interventions and Their Relationships to the Group Cognitive, Affective (PED), and Skills Domains.

Agent Course, we attend to the affective component through methods tailored to context (see Figure 2.1). In both interventions, we emphasize the affective dimension.

However, the two interventions also complement each other, and each addresses a limitation inherent in the other. Dialogues™ is a facilitation process for work units and an accompanying work session to embed those facilitation skills with the unit. It commingles equity goals with the other goals of an organization in the dual agenda approach examined in Chapter 1. We also adopted the Change Agent Course to compensate for the resulting tendency for evaluation of equity to take the form of measures products and outputs, the weakness of which we described in Chapter 1. This course centers social justice as the organizing construct and asks course participants to learn relevant content and reflect deeply, thus challenging the cognitive constructs that undergird both neoliberalism and meritocratic thinking. However, due to its emphasis on critique and critical reflection, the content can lead to the sense that without completely dismantling capitalism and its attendant neoliberal frameworks, no change is possible. Dialogues™ compensates for this pessimism. As a planning and workflow process, it focuses on identifying a group's scope of influence, developing a vision, planning how to

meet that vision, and specific listing of next actions along with equitable distribution of work—scaffolding forward movement while we are still enmeshed in the existing imperfect system.

### ***The Academic Department's Psycho-Emotional Dynamics***

Our model applies theories from social and behavioral psychology and sociology to implement micro-processes that build group practices that develop positive workplace climates. To understand, build, and assess the PED, we apply the constructs of dependence, interdependence, conflict, and collective efficacy (adapted from Goddard et al., 2004; Nolan et al., 2004). This requires a new way of seeing things exposes the limits of toxic beliefs and enables dialogue, collective action, and reflection toward a new desired end. We used the term psycho-emotional to refer to the 1) cognitions—expectations for responsibility and efficacy beliefs, and 2) shared emotions created by meeting or failing to meet the shared expectations. We extend Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory to develop the concept of the unit atmosphere specific to the academic department: interdependence (among faculty and chair), frustration and conflict (between faculty members or between faculty and chair), and dependence (on the chair or senior administrator).

Dependence measures the level of “dependency” on the leader or a few core faculty members. Members over relying on their leaders or other members to guide group activities may interfere with the functioning of the group, especially when those in power reduce overall faculty governance and/or are unable to live up to the unrealistic expectations of the group. A low level of dependence supports the alternative perspective of leadership that emphasizes a dispersed activity, which is not necessarily lodged in a single formally, designated leader or leader(s) (Parry & Bryman, 2006, p. 455).

Interdependence is the degree to which members of a department engage in cooperative activities and rely on each other to accomplish the goals of their unit. The essence of a group is the interdependence among members. For interdependence to exist, there must be more than one person or entity involved and the people or entities must impact each other. A change in the state of one individual or group causes a change in the state of the others. In some situations, leadership is preferably a collaborative and collective responsibility where the responsibilities, competencies, and decision-making are distributed onto several individuals rather than one (Collinson & Collinson, 2009; Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Because relational leadership is co-constructed, communication is a key element of relationally oriented leadership (Shamir, 2007).

Conflict is the degree to which group members address divergence of goals, issues, or norms. Conflict is manifested in several ways, including avoidance, accommodation, compromise, competing, and problem

solving (Van de Vliert, 1997). Conflict is resolved constructively when both parties are satisfied with the outcome, their relationship is undamaged or improved, and their ability to resolve future conflicts with each other is improved (Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

Collective efficacy is defined as “a group’s shared belief in their joint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce the levels of attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 476). It represents the degree of social cohesion; feelings of agency among members of the group; the shared belief in the efficacy of their group to work together and create improved conditions (Bandura, 1997). Perceived collective efficacy is not a monolithic group attribute (p. 479) and the level of collective efficacy for any given group may vary across different domains of activities.

The agelong debate about whether environment shapes the individual or vice versa, the nurture vs. nature debate, applies here. We suggest that influence runs both ways, but focus more on individuals’ impact on their collective environment, often within their departments, in what we refer to as the agentic perspective. People have *agency* to change their environment by themselves (personal agency), by getting others to effect change (proxy agency) and in collaboration with others (collective agency).

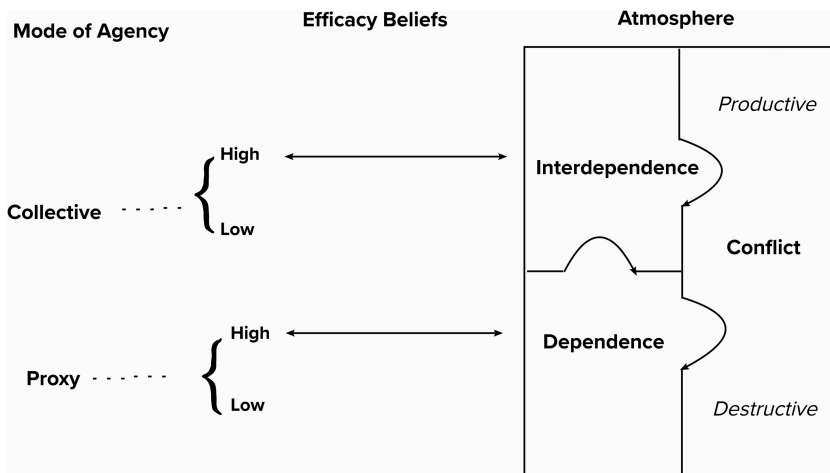
Bandura (1997) tells us that a significant predictor of success or failure in making a desired change is “efficacy belief.” Individual change is supported by having a high degree of “self-efficacy,” i.e., a belief in one’s own ability to be successful. If a person wants help in making a change they have high “proxy efficacy beliefs,” that is, a strong belief that the people from whom they want help will be effective. And where a group of people form to collaborate on change, we might describe their beliefs in their collective ability as being high or low collective efficacy. If a group has low collective efficacy, they do not believe in their collective ability to change.

A group’s PED has the following three components: 1) a shared expectation regarding who is responsible for the change in the department, 2) efficacy beliefs, and 3) a department atmosphere—based on shared emotion. PED begins with members’ expectation regarding who is responsible for the change (far left column of Figure 2.2). Do the members rely on each other, or do they expect some authority, like their chair, to be responsible? If most people in a department believe the chair will create a good working environment, we would refer to this as “high proxy efficacy” beliefs. When proxy efficacy is high, the atmosphere in the department is “satisfied dependence” (listed here as dependence). When proxy efficacy is low, the atmosphere in the department is one of frustration and conflict with the chair. However, faculty may also feel that everyone is needed to ensure success in changing the department “field.” We call this expectation “collective agency.” When everyone is participating fully as expected, we say collective efficacy is high and the atmosphere in the department is “satisfied interdependence”

(Interdependence). This also means that conflict is normally resolved productively. When faculty members do not all contribute or fail to live up to each other's expectation, we say that there is low collective efficacy. This leads to a department atmosphere that is filled with frustration and destructive conflict between faculty members.

To summarize, when collective agency is high, groups have high collective efficacy beliefs. This circumstance co-occurs in groups with an atmosphere wherein they recognize their interdependence and work through conflict productively. Similarly, a group with high proxy agency and efficacy beliefs is often in an atmosphere of dependence and exhibits destructive conflict. We are not asserting causal relationships here, but rather a systemic dynamic of feedback among these constructs. The model emphasizes the strong dynamic between interdependence and dependence and how each is related to conflict in productive and destructive forms respectively (see the far right of Figure 2.2).

Virtually all academic units suffer from inequity, although it manifests in idiosyncratic ways. Our change initiatives recognize that academic departments in higher education are often marked by various forms of inequality (hierarchies of status and power) that are structured and reproduced by cultural mechanisms. Inequalities arise from larger social contexts, but they are maintained and reproduced inside academic departments. Our approach also recognizes that no two academic units are the same. Therefore, it makes the distinct experiences, composition, and history of each unit the starting point for change. The process allows for individuals to bring their experiences and insights to the group and build on the perspectives of others. The emphasis is



*Figure 2.2* Psycho-Emotional Dynamics Illustrated: Agency, Efficacy Beliefs, and Atmosphere.



finding and creating common areas of interest and ideals. As we work with groups to move toward these positive realms, we discourage negativity, which can often occur through common approaches of focusing on distinct positions that are presented as oppositional, thus stalling action and agency.

A well-documented barrier to all kinds of collaborative relationships is an over-emphasis on the desired outcomes and ignoring the processes needed to attain these outcomes (Woodland & Hutton, 2012). We refocus attention on process, especially its affective dimension. Research shows that recurring and repetitive interaction patterns lead to less effective information flow in knowledge worker spheres like academia (Hoogeboom & Wilderom, 2020). Our observations suggest that such findings have had little impact on academic work processes. For example, faculty meetings typically follow a recurring structure in which faculty meet to listen to announcements, hear reports from committees, have a discussion (often dominated by a few voices) of the points made regarding any decisions that must be made, and then vote. Power within the department and lobbying outside of the meeting by groups of faculty can heavily influence votes. In our work, we are especially concerned with scaffolding transparent, equitable information sharing and inclusive, consensus-oriented decision-making processes within work groups that will enable them to identify and implement strategies to address the factors that characterize non-inclusive workplaces. This initiative is particularly relevant for groups in which a majority are from groups overrepresented and over-served in academia, who may have adopted group-level processes in which unacknowledged assumptions impede inclusive information sharing and decision-making processes.

### **The Problem of Nested Group Commitments**

Focusing on change at the group level has its limitations. Universities are part of the sociological phenomenon called *nested group commitments* (Lawler, 1992). Nested group commitments occur in contexts where people interact with others in a local or immediate *proximal* group that is nested within a larger, more removed group or organization called the *distal* group. Such nested structures can create coordination problems and inhibit the resolution of social dilemmas (i.e., situations in which there is a conflict between individual and collective interests). The group—either proximal or distal—that is perceived as responsible for an individual's positive felt emotions will be the target of higher levels of commitment, loyalty, and identity than the group to which no emotions are attributed (Lawler et al., 2009). Negative emotions are more likely to be attributed to distal groups, such that “solidarity and cohesion [develop] within the local group but not necessarily [in] any overarching, larger group” (Thye et al., 2014, p. 123).

The problem of nested group commitments is an integral part of the daily experiences of both faculty and central administrators in universities. Within a university, faculty members interact with colleagues in a department (proximal group) that is nested within the larger university (distal group). The nested structure of a university could limit the scope of our departmental work and unintentionally thwart larger institutional change. If faculty form stronger commitments to their departments than to the larger university, it becomes more challenging for the university to mobilize collective efforts on behalf of its overarching goals or sustain institutional change efforts over time.

Our group-level work is aimed at altering the psycho-emotional processes that affect a group's atmosphere. In particular, our goal is to create an embodied recognition of *interdependence* wherein all faculty feel that they have influence upon—and share the benefits and consequences of—group actions, including decision-making, faculty hiring, curriculum, allocation of resources, and strategic planning within the unit. Furthermore, the feeling of an interdependent atmosphere is positive, such that faculty will begin to attribute positive affect to their unit and the social interactions therein and become more invested in the well-being of the group. However, if we create positive affective attachments among faculty to their proximal groups, our work has the potential to create negative affective feelings toward the university, leading to adverse reactions to university initiatives for change or less support for the achievement of university goals and outcomes around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

However, the problem of nested commitments does not necessarily reflect an automatic inverse relationship in social commitments to proximal versus distal groups (Thye et al., 2014). In other words, the creation of positive affect at the department level does not, by default, lead to negative perceptions of or feelings toward the larger university. Returning again to the theory of social commitments, in order to avoid issues of nested commitments in hierarchical structures like universities, facilitation must consider the effects of control, responsibility, and accountability (Lawler et al., 2009). For example, Thye and Yoon (2015) find that when individuals in proximal groups perceive high levels of organizational support for their work by the larger, distal group, they are more likely to generalize their positive affective attachment to the proximal group outward to the larger organization. They also find that feelings of job autonomy lead to positive attributions of affect to both proximal and distal groups.

Our group-level facilitations—Dialogues™ and the Change Agent Course—are purposefully designed to take the problem of nested group commitments into account. The structure of the tasks and activities used in each facilitation is crafted in order to mitigate this problem. In Chapter 3, we highlight the design features of Dialogues™ aimed specifically at the nested commitment problem and present data which suggest we averted the creation of conflictual social commitments between

a faculty's department and the university. Our results also indicate the significant impact of department and disciplinary context on the outcomes, especially in terms of how group members perceive collective efficacy, interdependence, dependence, and conflict.

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