

ProSocials' Eight Core Design Principles



1 - Shared identity and purpose

A group functions best when its purpose is clearly understood and perceived as worthwhile by its members. A group also functions best when it offers a strong group identity, such that members are proud to belong and enjoy their time together. Prosocial is about creating cultures that constantly reflect on the “towards” move dynamically.



2 - Equitable distribution of contributions and benefits.

Most people have a strong sense of equity that is violated when someone receives benefits disproportionate to their contributions. Perceived fairness is essential for high group performance. Often this is about balance of effort (workload) and reward. Perceived unfairness is sometimes ‘undiscussable’ in groups and sometimes it is discussed endlessly but in ways that do not lead to positive change.



3 - Fair and inclusive decision-making

If you want good decisions and motivated people, group members need to be involved in making the decisions that affect them, particularly agreements about how the group runs. This can take the form of consensual decision making but in some circumstances consultation with a designated leader/representative, voting or even the opportunity to make objections (veto powers) can be enough and more efficient.



4 - Monitoring of agreed behaviors (Transparency)

Self-serving behaviors increase when there is a lack of transparency. Monitoring does not need to be coercive. It can be as simple as having regular check-ins or meetings to discuss progress. Research shows monitoring is usually better performed by peers as part of the normal interaction of group members.



5 - Graduated responding to helpful and unhelpful behaviour (Feedback)

Effective groups have in place responses to transgressions ranging from open, compassionate conversation to find out what happened, through to sanctions or even, ultimately, exclusion from the group. Research shows trust increases in groups when sanctioning occurs for unhelpful behaviors. But sanctions alone are not enough. To create enjoyment, belonging and engagement with the group, helpful behaviors must also be appropriately encouraged. Typically this can be as simple as expressing gratitude for helpful acts or it can be built into more formal recognition systems.



6 - Fast and fair conflict resolution

Any group that involves committed individuals acting authentically will inevitably encounter conflict as people have different interests and information. It is best to plan for conflicts and their resolution from the beginning by building conflict resolution skills among group members and creating helpful, flexible processes for conflict resolution.



7 - Authority to self-govern (according to principles 1-6)

Every group is embedded in a larger society that can limit its ability to govern its own affairs. These constraints can interfere with the objectives of the group and the implementation of design principles 1-6. For example, the context might impose excessive regulation on how the group behaves (e.g. when Human Resources departments constrain conflict resolution to formal procedures) or minimize the capacity of the group leader to act as a leader. Groups must be able to implement principles 1-6, without excessive interference, to function effectively.



8 - Collaborative relations with other groups (using principles 1-7)

If we are to build systems of cooperation, a group must relate to other groups using principles 1-7. This can go wrong in two ways: a) other groups may not cooperate with you (e.g. they don't include your group in important decisions, behave in ways that can't be monitored, and so on), or b) your group may not cooperate well with other groups. In this fashion, the same design principles are relevant at all levels of a multi-tier hierarchy of social units. For example, groups cooperate well when there is shared purpose, equity, inclusiveness in decision making etc between groups as well as within groups.