

Wilfred Bion

Bion's theory is based in large part on his work managing a rehabilitation unit for psychiatric patients in the British Army during World War II and later with small groups at the Tavistock Clinic.

The central concept in Bion's theory is that **in every group, two groups exist: the “work group” and the “basic assumption group”.**

The work group is that element of group functioning that is concerned with the primary task or work of the group. The mature work group is aware of its purpose and can define its task. Its members work cooperatively as separate and discrete members who willingly choose to belong to the group because they identify with interests of the group. This group tests its conclusions, seeks knowledge, and learns from its experience.

Bion notes that this level of maturity in the work group is very rare.

Basic Assumption: Dependency Group

The primary goal of the dependency group is to have its members protected by one individual, usually the leader. The group's behavior implies that the leader is all knowing and all-powerful, and that group members are ignorant, inadequate and immature.

The intelligence and power of the leader are never questioned or tested by the group. Because no one can possibly fulfill this role, the leader inevitably arouses the disappointment and hostility of the group. Eventually, the group will dismiss the leader and appoint another group member in her place. Unfortunately, the new leader is destined to face a similar fate.

Basic Assumption: Fight-Flight Group

The fight-flight group assumes that it must preserve itself at all costs, and that this can be done only by fighting or fleeing from someone or something. The group has no tolerance for weakness and expects casualties since salvation of the group is more important than the needs of individual members. The fight-flight leader must inspire great courage and self-sacrifice, and lead the group against a common enemy. If none exists, the leader will create one. A leader who fails to afford the group the opportunity for retreat or attack will be considered ineffective and ultimately ignored.

Basic Assumption: Pairing Group

The pairing group assumes that the group has met for the purposes of reproduction, to bring forth a Savior or Messiah. In this group, two people (regardless of gender) get together to carry out the task of creating a new leader who will solve all the group's problems, save the group from its own incompetence, and bring them into Utopia.

A new leader or idea resulting from the union often will be annihilated by the group, allowing the group maintain an air of hope and anticipation that another, as yet unborn leader will save it from feelings of despair and destruction (both its own and others).