CHAPTER 6

Groups and Formal Organizations

USING Your Sociological Imagination

Most people assume that conflict should be avoided because it is disruptive and interferes with group effectiveness. While this can be true, there are also social benefits associated with conflict and disagreement. Willingness to tolerate (and even encourage) disagreement can prevent what sociologists call *groupthink.*

The *Challenger* space shuttle disaster is an excellent example of a group making a catastrophic decision because it conformed to the larger group commitment. The *Challenger* was launched from Kennedy Space Center on January 28, 1986. Just over a minute after the launch, the *Challenger* exploded, taking the lives of all seven astronauts on board.

Like the teams of all space missions, the *Challenger* team was composed of a number of specialists. Its engineers had earlier recommended against takeoff because crucial parts had never been tested at a temperature as low as the temperature was on the morning of the takeoff. As victims of groupthink do, NASA leaders screened out this opposition by discounting the engineers' ability to make the "right" decision. Except for the engineers, the decision "to go" was unanimous. By avoiding consideration of a dissenting view, the majority lost the shuttle passengers and harmed NASA's long-term objectives. This chapter will look closely at behaviors of groups and organizations.

Sections

1. **Primary and Secondary Groups**
2. **Other Groups and Networks**
3. **Types of Social Interaction**
4. **Formal Organizations**

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to

❖ define the concepts of group, social category, and social aggregate.
❖ list the major characteristics of primary and secondary groups.
❖ describe five types of social interaction.
❖ discuss the advantages and disadvantages of bureaucracy.
❖ distinguish between formal and informal organizations.
❖ discuss the use of power within an organization and demonstrate its importance with examples.

SOCIOLOGY *Online*

Chapter Overview
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Section 1

Primary and Secondary Groups

Key Terms

- group
- social category
- social aggregate
- primary group
- primary relationships
- secondary group
- secondary relationships

Section Preview

Groups are classified by how they develop and function. Primary groups meet emotional and support needs, while secondary groups are task focused.

group
at least two people who have one or more goals in common and share common ways of thinking and behaving

Groups, Categories, and Aggregates

A **group** is composed of people who share several features, including the following.

❖ They are in regular contact with one another.
❖ They share some ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.
❖ They take one another's behavior into account.
❖ They have one or more interests or goals in common.

Groups play important roles in the lives of their members, as well as influence society around them. Groups range from the small and informal to the large and formal. They tend to draw lines around themselves, creating insiders and outsiders. Some groups have tighter, more definite boundaries than others. Boundaries between African Americans and whites in the South of the early 1960s were rigid. Members of the minority were unable to drink from the same water fountains, use the same rest rooms, or eat at the same restaurants as whites. Group boundaries may change over time, however. Since the 1960s, boundaries between African Americans and whites in the United States are much looser.

Compare these Korean choir members with the Denver concert goers. Explain why one is a group and the other is not.

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A group is not the same as a **social category**—people who share a social characteristic. High school seniors are a social category, for example. Women belong to another social category. A group is also sometimes confused with a **social aggregate**—people who happen to be in the same place at the same time, such as students waiting in line for concert tickets.

Although neither categories nor aggregates are groups, some of their members may form groups. Witnesses of a disaster (an aggregate) may work together to cope with an emergency. Citizens of a state (a social category) may band together in an organized tax revolt. These people may form a group if they begin to interact regularly; share ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving; take one another's behavior into account; and have some common goals.

social category
people who share a social characteristic

social aggregate
people temporarily in the same place at the same time

Primary Groups

Two principal types of groups are *primary* and *secondary*. At the extremes, the characteristics of these two types of groups—and the relationships that occur within them—are opposites. But most groups sit at different points along a continuum from primary to secondary.

primary group
people who are emotionally close, know one another well, and seek one another's company

What is a primary group?   Charles Horton Cooley, one of the founders of symbolic interactionism, was the first to use the term *primary group*. A **primary group** is composed of people who are emotionally close, know one another well, and seek one another's company. The members of a primary group have a "we" feeling and enjoy being together. These groups are characterized by **primary relationships** that are intimate, personal, caring, and fulfilling.

Primary groups are the most important setting for socialization. Family and childhood play groups are the first primary groups a child experiences. People, of course, participate in primary groups throughout life. Close friends in high school and college, neighbors who keep an eye on one another's children, and friends who meet weekly for golf are all examples of primary groups.

What type of group do you think is pictured above?

How do primary groups develop?   A number of conditions favor the development of primary groups and primary relationships.

❖ **Small size.** It is hard for members of large groups to develop close emotional ties. The chances of knowing everyone fairly well are far greater in small groups. The boys or girls who play for the school basketball team are more likely to develop primary relationships than the multitude of student spectators who cheer them on.

❖ **Face-to-face contact.** Primary relationships occur more easily when interaction is face to face. People who can see each other and who can experience nonverbal communication such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and touch are much more likely to develop close ties.

primary relationships
interactions that are intimate, personal, caring, and fulfilling

❖ **Continuous contact.** Closeness rarely develops in a short period of time. In spite of reported love at first sight, most of us require repeated social contact for the development of a primary relationship.

❖ **Proper social environment.** Just seeing someone every day in a close setting is not enough to form a primary relationship. You may visit your local video store every day and never form a relationship with the video

clerk. The social setting does not encourage personal relationships, and the statuses are unequal. This is why primary relationships do not usually develop between students and teachers, bosses and employees, or judges and lawyers.

What are the functions of primary groups?   Primary groups provide three important functions in society.

❖ **Emotional support.** At the end of World War II, the German army refused to crumble despite years of being outnumbered, undersupplied, and outfought. These conditions should have led to desertion and surrender, but they did not. Strong emotional support ties within German combat units kept them fighting against overwhelming odds.

❖ **Socialization.** For children, the family is the primary group that teaches them how to participate in social life. In like manner, primary groups promote adult socialization—as adults enter college, take new jobs, change social classes, marry, and retire.

❖ **Encourage conformity.** Primary groups not only teach new members the appropriate norms and values, these groups provide pressure to conform. William F. Whyte's (1993) study of an Italian slum gang illustrates encouragement to conform within primary groups. Whyte reported that bowling scores corresponded with status in the gang—the higher the rank, the higher the score. If a lower-ranked member began to bowl better than those above him, verbal remarks—"You're bowling over your head" or "How lucky can you get?"—were used to remind him that he was stepping out of line.

Secondary Groups

secondary group
people who share only part of their lives while focusing on a goal or task

Unlike a primary group, a **secondary group** is impersonal and goal oriented. It involves only a segment of its members' lives. Secondary groups exist to accomplish a specific purpose. Work groups, volunteers during disasters, and environmentalist organizations are examples of secondary groups. Members of secondary groups interact impersonally, in ways involving only limited parts of their personalities. These interactions are called **secondary relationships.** Interactions between clerks and customers, employers and workers, and dentists and patients are secondary relationships.

secondary relationships
impersonal interactions involving limited parts of personalities

What are secondary relationships like?   Members of secondary groups may be friends and identify with one another, but the purpose of the group is to accomplish a task, not to enrich friendships. In fact, if friendship becomes more important than the task, a secondary group may become ineffective. If the members of a basketball team become more interested in the emotional relationships among themselves or with their coach than in playing their best basketball, their play on the court could suffer.

Do secondary groups ever include primary relationships?
Although primary relationships are more likely to occur in primary groups and secondary relationships in secondary groups, there are a number of exceptions. Many secondary groups include some primary relationships. Members of work groups may relate in personal terms, demonstrate genuine concern for one another, and have

Why are these young people probably not a primary group?

relationships that are fulfilling in themselves. Similarly, members of a primary group sometimes engage in secondary interaction. One family member may, for example, lend money to another member of the family with a set interest rate and repayment schedule.

> 66
> Love thy neighbor as thyself, but choose your neighborhood.
>
> **Louise Beal**
> **American author**
> 99

Section 1 Assessment

1. Listed below are some examples of primary and secondary relationships. Indicate which examples are most likely to be primary relationships (P) and which are most likely to be secondary relationships (S).
   a. a marine recruit and his drill instructor at boot camp
   b. a married couple
   c. a coach and her soccer team
   d. a teacher and his students
   e. a car salesperson and her potential customer
2. Which of the following is not a condition that promotes the development of primary groups?
   a. small group size
   b. face-to-face contact
   c. continuous contact
   d. interaction on the basis of status or role
3. What are the three main functions of primary groups?

Critical Thinking

4. **Making Comparisons** Identify a primary group and a secondary group to which you belong. Describe three functions of each of these groups based on your personal experiences. Then compare and contrast your relationships in each group. (Note: It may help if you create a diagram.)

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Another Place

Work Life in China

Generally, Americans separate their work and nonwork life. When they don't, we say that they are "married" to their jobs. This means that most American work relationships are secondary relationships. They are impersonal and goal oriented. In China, however, work relationships are mostly primary because they are intimate, personal, caring, and fulfilling in themselves. This excerpt from *Streetlife China* describes a typical work situation in present-day China.

Everyone exists in China in terms of a work unit. When meeting for the first time, they will usually ask each other what work unit they are from. When ringing someone, the first question likely to be asked is, "What is your work unit?", which usually precedes the question of one's own name. When registering in a hotel, the registrar will list the guest in terms of "guest from such and such a work unit". . . .

The contemporary Chinese work unit, then, is really quite extraordinary. Apart from functioning as a department or organization, the work unit is also in charge of the management of the household register, the staple and non-staple food supply, all medical services, and all housing. It is also in charge of ideological remolding, political study, policing and security matters, marriages and divorce, entry into the Chinese Communist Youth League and into the Party, awarding merit and carrying out disciplinary action. If one wants to run for election as a deputy for either the National People's Congress or the Chinese People's Consultative Congress, one must firstly get the permission of one's work unit. When administrative sanctions are deployed to detain somebody, or they are to be sent for labor reform, then the authorities must consult with the work unit. "I am a person working in a work unit" is worn as a badge of pride in China; conversely, the expression "I don't have a work unit" basically identifies the speaker as little short of a swindler. . . .

Chinese have a love-hate relationship with the work unit. On the one hand, they cannot stand it, but on the other, they are unable to live without it. The work unit is like their family: they must love their commune as they love their family, love their factory as they love their home, and love their shop as they would their kin. In work units with a very rigid system, one's rank within the unit is a symbol of one's status; the individual's worth is realized in the rank attributed to them. Whether one's name is first or last, the order of arrival at the unit, their address, their living conditions, what transport is available to them, their access to documents of varying levels of classification are all things of great concern and are fought over at great length.

Source: Excerpted from Michael Dutton, *Streetlife China,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 43–44, 46–47.

Thinking It Over

Can you analyze the effects of the work unit in China in terms of its relationship to other groups to which workers belong?

Other Groups and Networks

Key Terms

- reference group
- in-group
- out-group
- social network

Reference Groups

We use certain groups to evaluate ourselves and to acquire attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms. Groups used in this way are called **reference groups.**

Reference groups may include our families, teachers, classmates, student government leaders, social organizations, rock groups, or professional football teams. We may consider a group to be a reference group without being a member; we may only aspire to be a member. For example, junior high school girls may imitate high school girls' leadership style or athletic interests. Junior high school boys may copy high school boys' taste in clothing and music. Similarly, you need not be a member of a rock band to view musicians as a reference group. You need only evaluate yourself in terms of their standards and subscribe to their beliefs, values, and norms.

Reference groups do not have to be positive. Observing the behavior of some group you dislike may reinforce a preference for other ways of acting, feeling, and behaving. For example, a violent gang should provide a blueprint of behavior for people to avoid.

Section Preview

Reference groups help us evaluate ourselves and form identities. In-groups and out-groups divide people into "we" and "they." Social networks extend our contacts and let us form links to many other people.

reference group
group used for self-evaluation and the formation of attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms

This choir commemorating the Emancipation Proclamation constitutes a positive reference group. Gangs are a negative reference group for neighborhood children.

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In-Groups and Out-Groups

in-group
exclusive group demanding intense loyalty

In-groups and out-groups are like two sides of a coin—you can't have one without the other. An **in-group** requires extreme loyalty from its members. Its norms compel members to exclude others. The in-group competes with and is opposed to the **out-group.** An out-group is a group toward which in-group members feel opposition, antagonism, or competition. Based on membership in these groups, people divide into "we" and "they."

out-group
group targeted by an in-group for opposition, antagonism, or competition

Where are these groups found?   In-groups and out-groups may form around schools, athletic teams, cheerleading squads, racially or ethnically divided neighborhoods, or countries at war. High school students can easily identify the many "in" and "out" groups in their schools. Jocks, cheerleaders, geeks, and nerds are in-groups for some and out-groups for others.

What are group boundaries?   In-groups must have ways of telling who is and is not "in." If nothing distinguishes "us" from "them," then there can be no "ins" and "outs." A boundary is often a symbol (badges, clothes, or a particular slang); it may be an action (handshake, high five); or it may be an actual place. New in-group members are often taught the boundaries at initiation ceremonies. To outsiders, group boundaries form an entrance barrier.

How are group boundaries maintained?   Maintaining group boundaries requires intense loyalty and commitment from the group members. Unfortunately, this may involve clashes with outsiders. Urban gang members may injure or kill an enemy gang member who has entered their "territory."

Social Networks

social network
a web of social relationships that join a person to other people and groups

As individuals and as members of primary and secondary groups, we interact with many people. All of a person's social relationships make up his or her **social network**—the web of social relationships that join a person to other people and groups. This social network includes family members, work colleagues, classmates, church members, close friends, car mechanics, and store clerks. Social networks tie us to hundreds of people within our communities, throughout the country, and even around the world (Doreian and Stokman, 1997).

Busy people have social networks that interconnect like this old telephone switchboard.

Your broader social network can be thought of as containing smaller webs within the larger web of social relationships, depending on how finely you wish to break it down. All of your friends are only one part of your total social network. Another part might be composed of all the people at your school with whom you have social relationships of various kinds.

The Internet is expanding the amount of interaction and the flow of information within networks. Before the Internet, for example, environmental

activists across the United States had to depend on slower, more cumbersome means of communication, such as the print media, the telephone, and letter writing. With the Internet, members of environmental organizations can supply almost unlimited information to as many people as they can reach. Volunteers, for example, can recruit others to write to political leaders protesting the Chesapeake Bay environmental problems. Protests in various regions of the country can be organized very quickly. Feedback among network members can be instantaneous.

This increased ease, speed, and frequency of social contact can promote a sense of membership in a particular network. Whereas in the past, opponents to gun control were largely unaware of each other, they may now feel part of a nationwide social network.

Are social networks groups?   Although a person's social network includes groups, it is not a group itself. A social network lacks the boundaries of a group and it does not involve close or continuous interaction among all members. Thus, all members of a social network do not necessarily experience a feeling of membership because many of the relationships are too temporary for a sense of belonging to develop.

How strong are the ties in a social network?   Social networks include both primary and secondary groups. Thus, the social relationships within a network involve both strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973; Freeman, 1992). Strong ties exist in primary relationships. Weak ties are most often found in secondary relationships.

What are the functions of social networks?   Social networks can serve several important functions. They can provide a sense of belonging and purpose. They can furnish support in the form of help and advice. Finally, networks can be a useful tool for those entering the labor market. Getting to know people who can help you in your career is very important.

Section 2 Assessment

1. Provide an example, not given in the text, of each of the following:
   a. out-group
   b. in-group
   c. social aggregate
   d. social category
   e. reference group

2. How are social networks different from social aggregates?

Critical Thinking

3. **Making Comparisons** Your high school has in-groups and out-groups. Concentrate on two of these groups and analyze sociologically the differences in the roles of group membership in one in-group and one out-group.

> Organization has been made by man; it can be changed by man.
>
> **William H. Whyte**
> **American sociologist**

Sociology Today

School Violence and Social Networks

The 1999 murders of twelve students and one teacher at Columbine High in Littleton, Colorado, captured the attention of the American public. There had been many earlier incidents of violence in schools, but the Columbine tragedy forced Americans to finally recognize that violence was not confined to troubled inner-city schools.

Explanations for the attack, which was carried out by two students, came rapidly. Some blamed the lack of gun control. Others looked to violent video games and movies. For others, it was the parents' fault. A fourth reason, suggested by many sociologists, involved failure of the community's social networks.

Social networks reduce violence in at least three ways.

1. Strong social bonds reinforce acceptable and unacceptable behavior.
2. Social networks allow community or neighborhood members to share information about other members.
3. Social networks provide help and social support.

According to Laub and Lauritsen (1998), when many people are involved in their community networks, "social capital" is amassed. Social capital is the degree to which a person can depend on others in the community for help and support. For young people, community support can help compensate for a lack of closeness in families.

The social capital of the community can to a considerable extent offset its absence in particular families in the community. For example, children from single-parent families are more like their two-parent counterparts in both achievement and in continuation in school when the schools are in communities with extensive social capital (Coleman, 1987:10).

In the Littleton case, social capital seemed in short supply. The parents of Eric Harris, one of the students who carried out the attack, were out of touch with the bomb-making activity occurring in their own home. More important, the rest of the community seemed unaware of any problem with these students. The only exception was a family that alerted authorities to threats Harris had posted on the Internet. But upon receiving this information, the sheriff's office apparently did not seek additional information from other members of the community (Gegax and Bai, 1999).

School violence can be diminished through the building of community networks. Both parents and young people must be willing to build social ties with other people in their neighborhoods and communities.

Doing Sociology

Examine some of the social networks in your neighborhood and community. How strong are they? What could be done to strengthen them?

Types of Social Interaction

Key Terms

- cooperation
- conflict
- social exchange
- coercion
- conformity
- groupthink

Five Types of Group Social Interaction

Social interaction is crucial to groups. In group settings, people take on roles and adopt appropriate norms and behaviors. These may be very different from the norms and behaviors that the individual holds in other settings. For example, you may behave one way as a member of a choir or a basketball team, but act quite differently when you are at home or out with your friends. In this section, we will look closely at those processes or forces that determine how individuals behave in a group setting. Robert Nisbet (1988) describes five types of social interaction basic to group life: *cooperation, conflict, social exchange, coercion,* and *conformity.* Some of these interactions keep the group stable and ongoing, while others encourage change.

Cooperation

Cooperation is a form of interaction in which individuals or groups combine their efforts to reach some goal. Cooperation usually occurs when reaching a goal demands the best use of limited resources and efforts. The survivors of a plane crash in a snow-covered mountain range must cooperate to survive. Victims of floods, mudslides, tornadoes, droughts, or famines must help one another to get through their crisis.

Cooperation exists outside of emergencies as well: Children agree to a set of rules for a game, couples agree to share household duties, and students organize to march in support of a community project. Indeed, without some degree of cooperation, social life could not exist.

Conflict

Groups or individuals that work together to obtain certain benefits are cooperating. Groups or individuals that work against one another for a larger share of the rewards are in **conflict.** In conflict, defeating the opponent is considered essential. In fact, defeating the opponent may become more important than achieving the goal and may bring more satisfaction than winning the prize.

What are the societal benefits of conflict? As you read in Using Your Sociological Imagination on page 171, conflict is usually considered a

Section Preview

Five types of social interaction are basic to group life: cooperation, conflict, social exchange, coercion, and conformity.

cooperation
interaction in which individuals or groups combine their efforts to reach a goal

conflict
interaction aimed at defeating an opponent

These Habitat for Humanity volunteers are cooperating in an effort to provide shelter for a family in need.

A group of demonstrators, their hands painted in white to symbolize their opposition to violence, march through downtown Genoa, Italy, to protest against the 2001 Group of Eight summit. What was one possible societal benefit of this demonstration?

disruptive form of interaction. A cooperative, peaceful society is assumed to be better than one in conflict. Conflict can be socially beneficial, however.

According to sociologist Georg Simmel (1858–1918), one of the major benefits of conflict is the promotion of cooperation and unity *within* opposing groups. The Revolutionary War drew many American colonists together, even though it brought them into conflict with the British. Similarly, a labor union often becomes more united during the process of collective bargaining. A neighborhood bully can unite (at least temporarily) even the most argumentative of brothers.

Another positive effect of conflict is the attention it draws to social inequities. Norms and values are reexamined when crises and conflicts erupt. Civil rights activists in the early 1960s, for instance, jarred the American Congress into passing laws that ensure basic rights and freedoms to all people.

Conflict may also be beneficial when it changes norms, beliefs, and values. Student protests in the late 1960s and early '70s (many of which were violent) resulted in changes to previously accepted norms and behaviors within universities. University administrations became more sensitive to diverse student needs, and more emphasis was placed on teaching.

Social Exchange

All men, or most men, wish what is noble but choose what is profitable; and while it is noble to render a service not with an eye to receiving one in return, it is profitable to receive one. One ought, therefore, if one can, to return the equivalent of services received, and to do so willingly.

In this passage from *The Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle touches on **social exchange,** a type of social interaction in which one person voluntarily does something for another, expecting a reward in return. If you help a friend wash her car, expecting that she will help you study for a test, the relationship is one of exchange.

In an exchange relationship, it is the benefit to be earned rather than the relationship itself that is key. When you do something for someone else, he or she becomes obligated to return the favor. Thus, the basis of an exchange relationship is *reciprocity,* the idea that you should do for others as they have done for you.

social exchange
a voluntary action performed in the expectation of getting a reward in return

What is the difference between cooperation and social exchange?
While both cooperation and social exchange involve working together, there is a significant difference between these two types of interaction. In cooperation, individuals or groups work together to achieve a shared goal. Reaching this goal, however, may or may not benefit those who are cooperating. And although individuals or groups may profit from cooperating, that is not their main objective.

For example, group members may work to build and maintain an adequate supply of blood for a local blood bank without thought of benefit to themselves. This is an example of cooperation. Suppose, though, that the group is working to ensure availability of blood for its own members. In this case, it has an exchange relationship with the blood bank. In cooperation, the question is, "How can we reach our goal?" In exchange relationships, the implied question is, "What is in it for me?"

These high school students are working together in a computer lab. Explain why this could be a social exchange relationship.

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coercion
interaction in which individuals or groups are forced to behave in a particular way

What type of social interaction is involved in city curfews?

conformity
behavior that matches group expectations
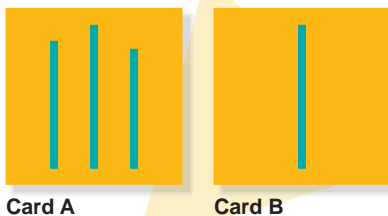
Card A   **Card B**

Figure 6.1   Cards for Asch's Experiments. *Which of the lines on Card A matches the line on Card B? You may be surprised to learn that in a group setting many people associated the first and the third lines with the longer line on Card B. Read about Asch's experiment in the text.*

Coercion

Coercion is social interaction in which individuals or groups are forced to give in to the will of other individuals or groups. Prisoners of war can be forced to reveal information to enemies, governments can enforce laws through legalized punishment, and parents can control the behavior of young children by threatening to withdraw privileges.

Coercion is the opposite of social exchange. Whereas social exchange involves voluntary conformity for mutual benefit, coercion is a one-way street. The central element in coercion, then, is domination. This domination may occur through physical force, such as imprisonment, torture, or death. More often, however, coercion is expressed more subtly through social pressure—ridicule, rejection, withdrawal of affection, or denial of recognition.

Conflict theory best describes this type of social interaction. When parents coerce children with a curfew, guards coerce prisoners with force, and governments coerce drivers with fines, obvious power differentials are at work.

Conformity

Conformity is behavior that matches group expectations. When we conform, we adapt our behavior to fit the behavior of those around us. Social life—with all its uniformity, predictability, and orderliness—simply could not exist without this type of social interaction. Without conformity, there could be no churches, families, universities, or governments. Without conformity, there could be no culture or social structure.

Do most people conform to group pressures?   The tendency to conform to group pressure has been dramatically illustrated in a classic experiment by Solomon Asch (1955). In this experiment, many participants publicly denied their own senses because they wanted to avoid disagreeing with majority opinion.

Asch asked groups of male college students to compare lines printed on two cards. (See Figure 6.1.) The students were asked to identify the line on the second card that matched, in length, one of the lines on the first card. In each group, all but one of the subjects had been instructed by Asch to choose a line that obviously did not match. The *naive* subject—the only member of each group unaware of the real nature of the experiment—was forced either to select the line he actually thought matched the standard line or to yield to the unanimous opinion of the group.

In earlier tests of individuals in isolation, Asch had found that the error rate in matching the lines was only 1 percent. Under group pressure, however, the naive subjects went along with the majority's wrong opinion over one-third of the time. If this large a proportion of naive subjects yielded to group pressure in a group of strangers, it is not difficult to imagine the conformity rate in groups where people are emotionally committed to the welfare of the group (Myers, 1999).

What is groupthink?   Because of the difficulty of going against decisions made by the group, Irving Janis (1982) has argued that many decisions are likely to be the product of *groupthink.* **Groupthink** exists when thinking in a group is self-deceptive, based on conformity to group beliefs, and created by group pressure. In groupthink, pressures toward uniformity discourage members from expressing their concerns about group decisions.

During the administration of President John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s, for example, the president and his advisers decided to launch an invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. The invasion failed. Analysis by Janis revealed that during the decision process, because of group pressure, several top advisers failed to admit that they thought the plan would probably not succeed.

Research indicates that groupthink can be avoided when leaders or group members make a conscious effort to see that all group members participate actively in a multisided discussion. In addition, members must know that points of disagreement and conflict will be tolerated (Moorhead, Neck, and West, 1998; Myers, 1999).

groupthink
self-deceptive thinking that is based on conformity to group beliefs, and created by group pressure to conform
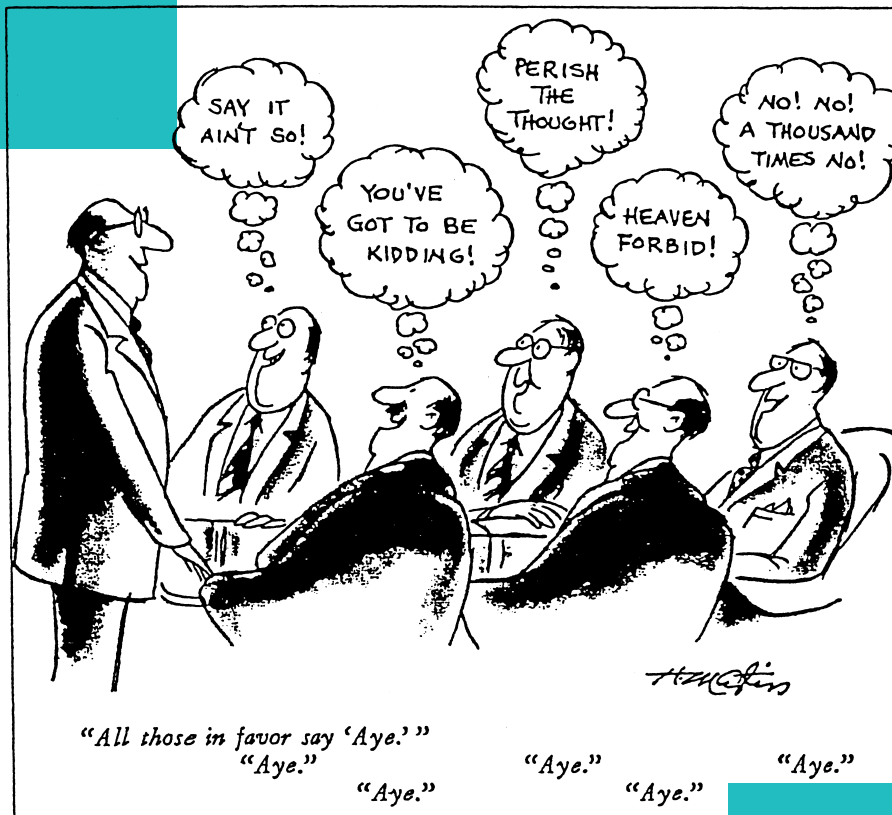
How is groupthink promoted?

Figure 6.2 Focus on Theoretical Perspectives

Illustrating Types of Social Interaction. A type of social interaction is illustrated below from the viewpoint of a particular theoretical perspective. Each concept can be viewed from either of the other two perspectives. Associate a type of social interaction with a different theoretical perspective and make up your own example.

Theoretical Perspective	Type of Social Interaction	Example
Functionalism	Conformity	Team integration is promoted when basketball players accept their roles on the floor.
Conflict Theory	Coercion	Conflict in prisons is kept in check by the superior power of the guards.
Symbolic Interactionism	Social Exchange	Two neightbors share recipes and ideas so each benefits.

Section 3 Assessment

Match terms a–e with the appropriate numbered example.

1. Blood donors expect payment.
2. Students read what a teacher assigns.
3. Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait.
4. Flood victims help each other.
5. Employees are forced to work overtime or be fired.

a. cooperation
b. conflict
c. social exchange
d. coercion
e. conformity

6. Solomon Asch's experiment demonstrates the positive consequences of group pressure. *T* or *F*?
7. Why is conformity essential for the development of social structures?

Critical Thinking

8. **Analyzing Information** Describe an example of groupthink in your school. Analyze this situation in terms of its positive or negative consequences.

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Tech Trends

Working in the Virtual Office

Vanishing are the traditional offices [in formal organizations] that occupy a common, fixed space, and employ a totally permanent workforce. Numerous companies are now utilizing what have come to be called "virtual offices." For the most part, these offices are staffed by at-home employees who telecommute, use Internet resources, and are frequently temporary employees.

Virtual offices offer many benefits in today's climate of global competition. For those workers who previously found it difficult to work outside the home (the elderly, [disabled], or parents with child-care responsibilities), telecommuting can be a vehicle into the workforce. What's more, corporate executives and managers enjoy advantages of the Internet: It provides rich resources of both people and information; it improves operations; it markets products. In fact, telecommuting has been shown to result in productivity gains of between 15–20%. Finally, virtual offices afford companies dramatic savings in the costs of employees and facilities.

But what of the problems associated with telecommuting? Notable is the telecommuters' sense of alienation. They may feel isolated from fellow workers and the larger organization. This alienation can be minimized by bringing telecommuters together for periodic meetings. Ostensibly established to allow telecommuters to report to their supervisors, such get-togethers serve to reinforce the telecommuters' membership in, and loyalty to, the organization for which they work.

Two other difficulties confront the telecommuter. The first is low wages. In most instances, wages paid for work done by home telecommuters lag noticeably behind wages paid to office workers. This is unlikely to change given the difficulties that trade unions face in unionizing such workers. The second difficulty is the family tension stemming from the home/office merger. Until traditional views about appropriate work locations become more enlightened, home telecommuters are likely to be perceived by other family members as "not really working."

Source: William E. Snizek, "Virtual Offices: Some Neglected Considerations," *Communications of the ACM*, 38 (September 1995):15, 16. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Analyzing the Trends

Do you think the trend toward the virtual office is a good thing? Defend your answer from a functionalist viewpoint.

Focus on Research

Experiment: Group Pressure and Obedience

Can a group cause a person to physically punish a victim with increasing severity despite the victim's pleas for mercy? Researcher Stanley Milgram (1963, 1974) has shown that this could happen.

As noted in the text, Solomon Asch demonstrated that group pressure can influence people to make false claims about what they see. Specifically, experimental subjects can be pressured to claim that two lines (drawn on a card) match in length even though they originally perceived these same two lines as different in length. Milgram wanted to know if group pressure can have the same effect on behavior. Can group pressure cause people to treat others in ways they otherwise would not?

To test this question, Milgram could have chosen a desired behavior relatively easy to induce, such as sharing food with a stranger or damaging someone else's property. Choosing a much harder case, Milgram asked research participants to administer increasingly stronger electric shocks to people who appeared to be in pain. And these research participants were people just like you and me!

Milgram placed eighty males in an experimental situation in which a team of three individuals (two "confederates" who knew the nature of the experiment and one "subject" who did not) tested a fourth person (who was also in on the experiment) on a learning task. Each mistake by the fourth party brought an apparent electric shock from the subject. The two confederates (participants cooperating with Milgram) on each team suggested increasingly higher shock levels for successive mistakes made by the "learner" (the third confederate in the electric chair). The researcher recorded the degree to which the "operator" (the subject of the experiment) resisted or went along with group pressure to increase the voltage levels.

After explaining to the subject that the purpose of the experiment was to determine the effects of punishment (electric shocks) on memory, the learner was strapped into an electric-chair apparatus in full view of the other three team members. These three were seated in front of a large shock generator whose switches were labeled from 15 to 450 volts in 15-volt increments. The lowest-level group of switches was labeled "Slight Shock"; the highest-level group of switches read "Danger: Severe Shock."

The "operator" controlled the maximum shock that could be administered. He could keep the shock level at 15 volts throughout or

increase the shock level in line with the group's recommendation. It was his decision. (Remember—he was the only one not in on the real purpose.)

The learner was primed to not only answer questions incorrectly. As the shocks become stronger, he grunted, protested, and finally demanded that the experiment stop. Each of these complaints was actually prerecorded and played in coordination with a given shock level. No discomfort was indicated until a 75-volt shock was administered. At 120 volts, the learner shouted that the shocks were becoming painful. Groans followed a 135-volt shock, and at 150 volts the learner cried out to be released from the experiment, complaining of a heart condition. At 180 volts, the learner cried out, "I can't stand the pain," and 285 volts was followed by an agonized scream. From 300 to 450 volts, the learner continuously shouted desperately that he would no longer answer questions.

Milgram first needed to know how far the operator would go in administering shocks *without* group influence. To accomplish this, an identical experiment was run minus the two confederates in the punishing group. Response to group pressure was measured by the difference in the operator's behavior in the two situations.

Group pressure heavily affected the level of shock administered by the operator. That is, the average shock level in the three-person situation was significantly higher than in the one-person situation. Perhaps most interesting are the results on *maximum* shock levels. When alone, only two operators went beyond the point where the learner first vehemently protested. Under group pressure, twenty-seven of the operators went beyond this point. Nineteen of the operators went above 255 volts ("Intense Shock"), and ten went into the group of voltages labeled "Danger: Severe Shock." Seven even reached 450 volts (the highest shock level possible).

The research by Milgrim and Asch reveal the power of group pressure to create conformity in thought and behavior. Clearly, conformity must occur for social structure and society to exist. What worries many scholars is the extent to which social pressure can determine how humans think and act.

Photographs from Stanley Milgram's experiment show participants ordering higher and higher level shocks for the actor pretending to be shocked.

Working with the Research

1. Discuss the ethical implications of Milgram's experiment. (You may want to refer to Chapter 2, pp. 59–61, for a discussion about ethics in social research.)

2. If the researcher had not been present as an authority figure during the experiment to approve the use of all shock levels, do you think group pressure would have been as effective? Explain.

3. Discuss some implications of this experiment for democratic government. Can you relate it to George Orwell's novel *1984*?

4. Do you think society would be possible without this tendency to conform? Explain your position.

Formal Organizations

Key Terms

- **formal organization**
- **bureaucracy**
- **power**
- **authority**
- **rationalization**
- **informal organization**
- **iron law of oligarchy**

Section Preview

A formal organization is created to achieve some goal. Most are bureaucratic. The existence of primary groups and primary relationships within formal organizations can either help or hinder the achievement of goals.

formal organization
a group deliberately created to achieve one or more long-term goals

bureaucracy
a formal organization based on rationality and efficiency

The Nature of Formal Organizations

Until the 1920s, the majority of Americans lived on farms or in small towns and villages. Nearly all of their daily lives were spent in primary groups such as families, neighborhoods, and churches. As industrialization and urbanization have advanced, however, Americans have become more involved in secondary groups. Born in hospitals, educated in large schools, employed by huge corporations, regulated by government agencies, cared for in nursing homes, and buried by funeral establishments, Americans, like members of other industrialized societies, now often find themselves within *formal organizations* (Pfeffer, 1997).

How are formal organizations and bureaucracies related? A **formal organization** is deliberately created to achieve one or more long-term goals. Examples of formal organizations are high schools, colleges, corporations, government agencies, and hospitals.

Most formal organizations today are also **bureaucracies**—formal organizations based on rationality and efficiency. Although bureaucracies are popularly thought of as "monuments to inefficiency," they have proven to be effective in industrial societies.

Both these Japanese workers and these bank customers in the U.S. feel the effects of the formal organization structure. Do you think most organizations are bureaucratic in nature?

◀ **CONTENTS** ▶

Major Characteristics of Bureaucracies

All bureaucracies possess certain characteristics. The most important of these are listed below.

❖ **A division of labor based on the principle of specialization.** Each person in a bureaucracy is responsible for certain functions or tasks. (See Figure 6.3 for an organizational chart outlining the division of labor in a public school district.) This specialization allows an individual to become an expert in a limited area.

❖ **A hierarchy of authority.** Before discussing authority, it is necessary to define power. **Power** refers to the ability to control the behavior of others, even against their will. **Authority** is the exercise of legitimate power—power that derives from a recognized or approved source.

power
the ability to control the behavior of others

authority
the legitimate or socially approved use of power
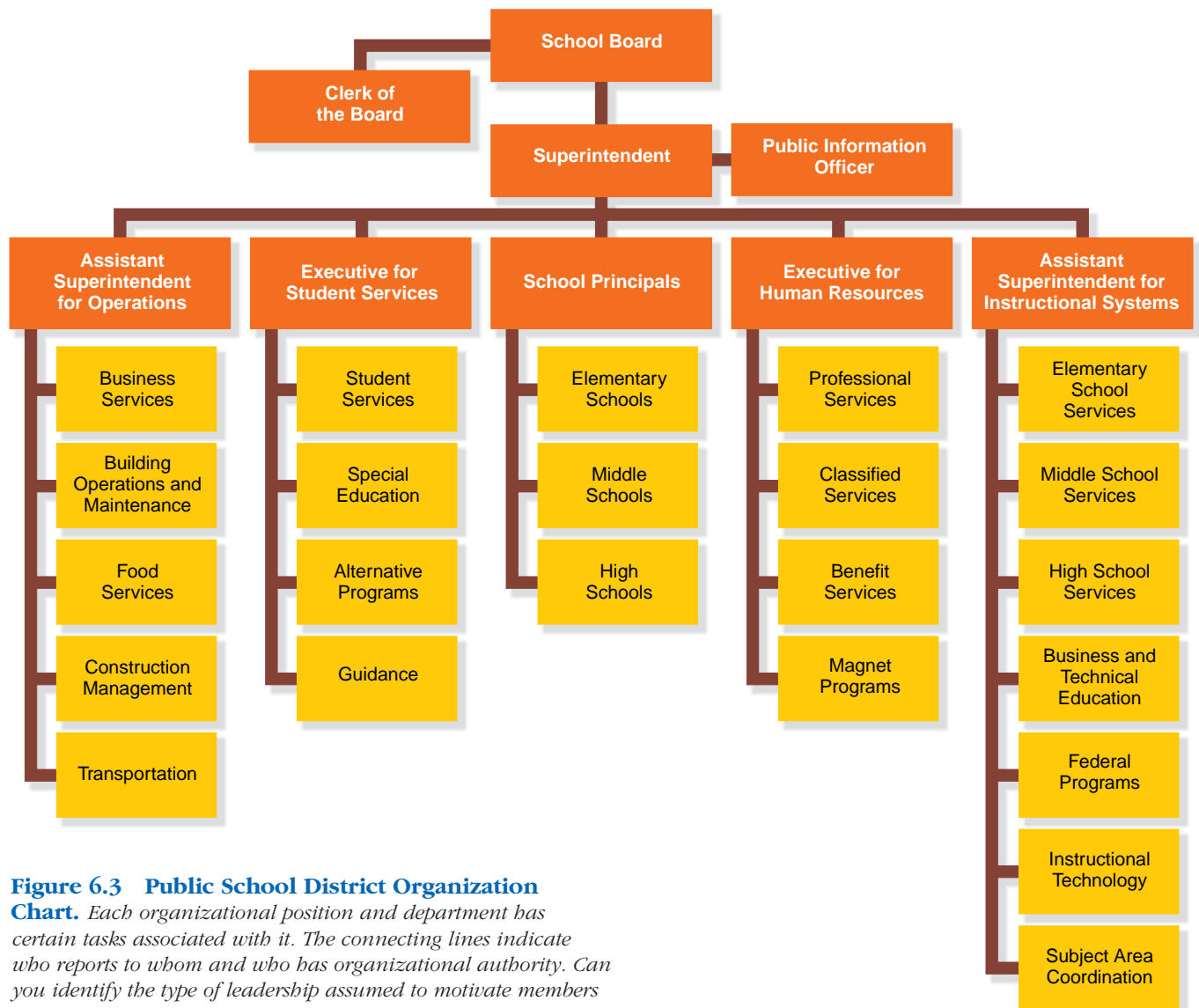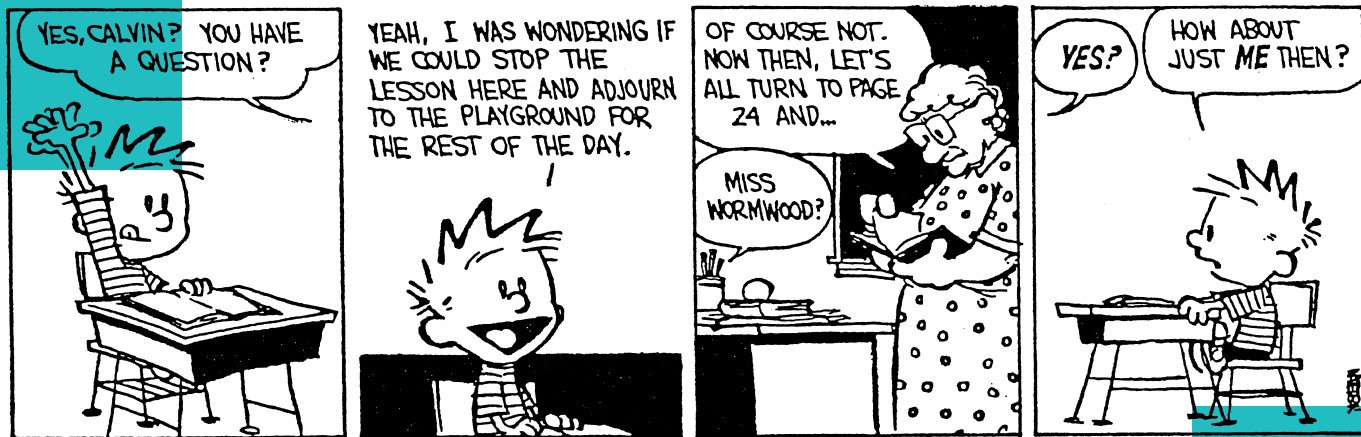

Figure 6.3   Public School District Organization Chart. *Each organizational position and department has certain tasks associated with it. The connecting lines indicate who reports to whom and who has organizational authority. Can you identify the type of leadership assumed to motivate members of any bureaucratic organization?*

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Calvin doesn't think that bureaucratic rules should apply to him if they interfere with his wishes.

People submit to authority because they believe it is the right thing to do. With respect to authority, bureaucratic organizations are like pyramids. The greatest amount of authority is concentrated in a few positions at the top, with decreasing amounts of authority in a larger number of lower positions. This is what is meant by "hierarchy of authority."

❖ **A system of rules and procedures.** Rules and procedures direct how work is to be done and provide a framework for decision making. They stabilize the organization because they coordinate activities and provide guidelines to follow in most situations.

❖ **Written records of work and activities.** Written records of work and activities are made and then kept in files. This organizational "memory" is essential to smooth functioning, stability, and continuity.

❖ **Promotion on the basis of merit and qualifications.** Jobs are filled on the basis of technical and professional qualifications. Promotions are given on the basis of merit, not favoritism. The norm in a bureaucracy is equal treatment for all.

Max Weber and Bureaucracy

Max Weber was the first to analyze the nature of bureaucracy. Although he recognized there were problems with this type of organization, overall he believed that bureaucracies were very efficient in dealing with the needs of industrial societies.

What are the advantages of bureaucracy?   In Chapter 1, you read how Weber feared the dehumanizing effects of bureaucracies. As the values of preindustrial societies began to weaken, however, Weber also saw advantages to bureaucracy. On these advantages, he wrote the following:

The decisive reason for the advance of bureaucratic organization has always been its purely technical superiority over any other form of or-

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ganization. The fully developed bureaucratic mechanism compares with other organizations exactly as does the machine with the nonmechanical modes of production (Gerth and Mills, 1958:214).

Earlier kinds of organizations, where the decision makers were chosen on the basis of family or wealth, were just not capable of dealing with an industrial economy. The fast-moving industrial economy required steadiness, precision, continuity, speed, efficiency, and minimum cost—advantages bureaucracy could offer. **Rationalization**—the mindset emphasizing knowledge, reason, and planning rather than tradition and superstition—was on the rise. (See pages 17–18 for a review of this concept.)

rationalization
the mind-set emphasizing knowledge, reason, and planning

Snapshot of America
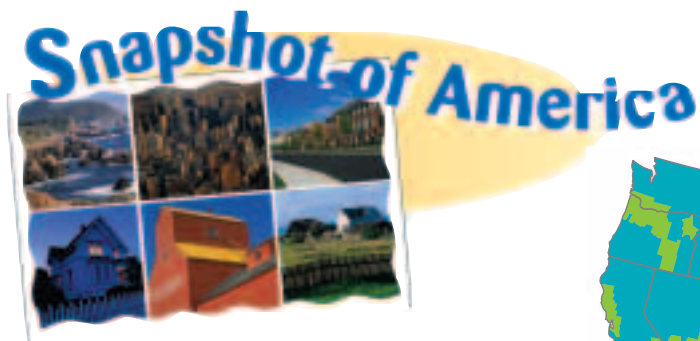
Membership in Fraternal Orders

You may not realize it, but fraternal orders, such as Moose, Elk, Eagles, and Shriners, are bureaucracies. They have a division of labor, hierarchy of authority, system of rules and procedures, written records, and promotion based on merit within the organization. This map shows fraternal organization membership by region in relation to the national average.
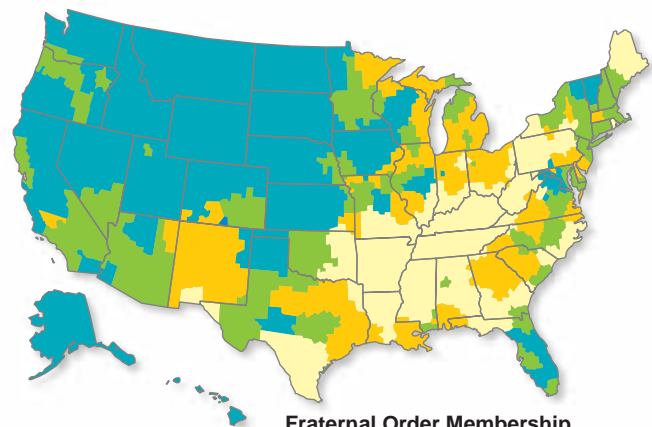
Fraternal Order Membership Compared to U.S. Average
- High
- Above average
- Below average
- Low

Interpreting the Map

Look back at the map of population densities in the United States on page 57. Do you see any patterns common to that map and this one? Explain.
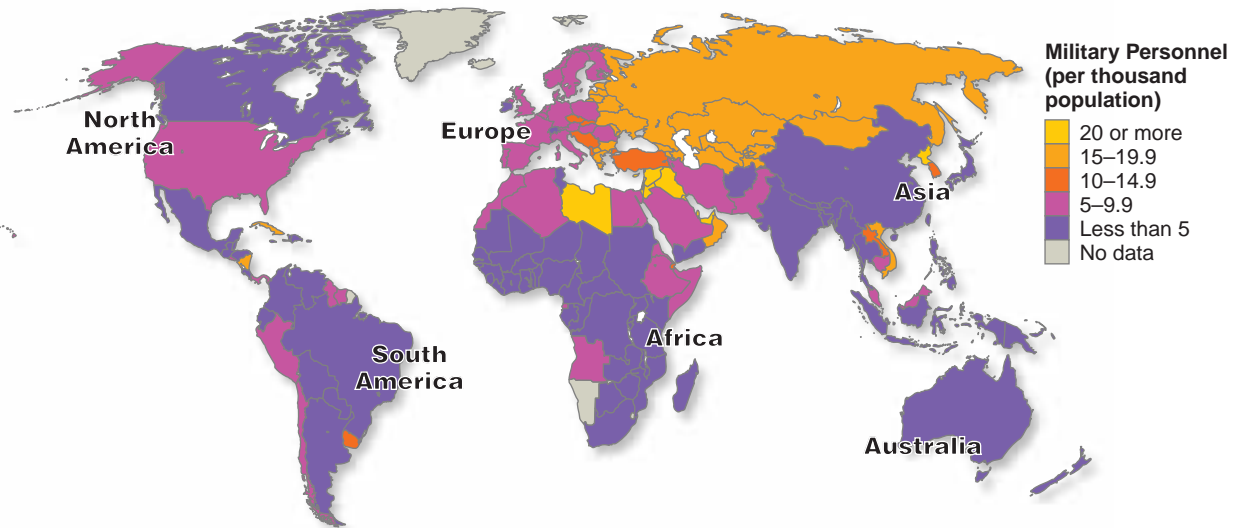
Adapted from *Latitudes and Attitudes: An Atlas of American Tastes, Trends, Politics, and Passions*. Boston: Little Brown.

World View

Military Might

In preindustrial societies, military groups are loosely organized and informal in nature. They are composed of group members who live nonmilitary lives except during defense emergencies. In industrial societies, bureaucratic principles are applied to military organizations.

Military Personnel (per thousand population)

- 20 or more
- 15–19.9
- 10–14.9
- 5–9.9
- Less than 5
- No data

North America

Europe

Asia

South America

Africa

Australia

Interpreting the Map

Does this map show a relationship between the type of political leadership and the extent of citizen participation in the military? If so, describe this relationship.

Adapted from *Atlas of the World Today*. New York: Harper & Row.

Do bureaucracies undervalue people?   As strange as it might sound, bureaucracy is designed to protect individuals. People often complain about the rules, procedures, and impersonal treatment that characterize bureaucracy. Without them, though, decision making would be arbitrary and without reason. It might sound great, for example, to abolish final exams, but then grading would not be objective. For example, a teacher might give higher grades to males. This is not to say that favoritism never occurs in bureaucratic organizations. Nevertheless, the presence of rules guarantees at least a measure of equal treatment.

informal organization
groups within a formal organization in which personal relationships are guided by norms, rituals, and sentiments that are not part of the formal organization

Informal Structure within Organizations

Bureaucracies are designed to act as secondary groups. As anyone who has worked in a bureaucratic organization knows, though, there are primary relationships as well. Primary relationships emerge as part of the **informal organization**—groups within a formal organization in which personal rela-

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tionships are guided by norms, rituals, and sentiments that are not part of the formal organization. Based on common interests and personal relationships, informal groups are usually formed spontaneously.

When were informal organizations first studied?   The existence of informal organizations within bureaucracies was first documented in the mid-1920s, when a group of Harvard researchers was studying the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company in Chicago. In a study of fourteen male machine operators in the Bank Wiring Observation Room, F. J. Roethlisberger and William Dickson (1964, originally published in 1939) observed that work activities and job relationships were based on norms and social sanctions of that particular group of male operators. Group norms prohibited "rate busting" (doing too much work), "chiseling" (doing too little work), and "squealing" (telling group secrets to supervisors). Conformity to these norms was maintained through ridicule, sarcasm, criticism, and hostility.

Why do informal organizations develop?   Informal groups exist to meet needs ignored by the formal organization. Modern organizations tend to be impersonal, and informal groups offer personal affection, support, humor, and protection. The study mentioned above pointed out that informal organizations encourage conformity, but the resulting solidarity protects group members from mistreatment by those outside the group.

Despite working in a bureaucratic organization, these construction workers seem to be on very personal terms. How do sociologists explain this?

Iron Law of Oligarchy

If an organization's goals are to be achieved, power must be exercised. Sometimes this power may be grabbed by individuals for their own purposes. This process is described by the *iron law of oligarchy* (Michels, 1949; originally published in 1911).

iron law of oligarchy
theory that power increasingly becomes concentrated in the hands of a few members of any organization

What is the iron law of oligarchy?   According to the **iron law of oligarchy,** formulated by German sociologist Robert Michels, power increasingly tends to become more and more concentrated in the hands of fewer members of any organization. Michels observed that, even in organizations intended to be democratic, a few leaders eventually gain control, and other members become virtually powerless. He concluded that this increased concentration of power occurs because those in power want to remain in power.

The government in communist China is a prime example of Michels's principle. Not subject to popular election, the aging individuals at the top have been able to consolidate, or strengthen, their power over a long period of time. Each of the leaders is able to build a loyal staff, control money, offer jobs, and give favors.

Why does organization lead to oligarchy?   According to Michels, three organizational factors encourage oligarchy. First, organizations need a hierarchy of authority to delegate decision making. Second, the advantages held by those at the top allow them to consolidate their powers. They can create a staff that is loyal to them, control the channels of communication, and use organizational resources to increase their power. Finally, other members of the organization tend to defer to leaders—to give in to those who take charge.

Section 4 Assessment

1. Define the term *formal organization.*
2. List the major characteristics of bureaucracy, according to Max Weber.
3. Identify whether the following are advantages (A) or disadvantages (D) of a bureaucracy:
   a. its use of appropriate criteria in hiring employees
   b. its use of rules to provide definite guidelines for behavior within the organization
   c. its ability to hide the true nature of authority relationships
   d. its encouragement of administrative competence in managers
4. Can you describe the form of leadership most suited to the operation of the iron law of oligarchy? Explain your answer.

Critical Thinking

5. **Synthesizing Information**   Analyze your school as a bureaucracy. Give an example of the following characteristics of bureaucracy: (1) system of rules and procedures; (2) impersonality and impartiality (lack of favoritism). Discuss a positive and negative consequence of each characteristic.

"

Guidelines for Bureaucrats:
(1) When in charge—
    ponder.
(2) When in trouble—
    delegate.
(3) When in doubt—
    mumble.

**James H. Boren
business author**

"

Summary

Section 1: Primary and Secondary Groups

Main Idea: Groups are classified by how they develop and function. Primary groups meet emotional and support needs, while secondary groups are task focused.

Section 2: Other Groups and Networks

Main Idea: Reference groups help us evaluate ourselves and form identities. In-groups and out-groups divide people into "we" and "they." Social networks extend our contacts and let us form links to many other people.

Section 3: Types of Social Interaction

Main Idea: Five types of social interaction are basic to group life: cooperation, conflict, social exchange, coercion, and conformity.

Section 4: Formal Organizations

Main Idea: A formal organization is created to achieve some goal. Most are bureaucratic. The existence of primary groups and primary relationships within formal organizations can either help or hinder the achievement of goals.

SOCIOLOGY Online

Self-Check Quiz
Visit the *Sociology and You* Web site at soc.glencoe.com and click on **Chapter 6—Self-Check Quizzes** to prepare for the chapter test.

CLICK HERE

Reviewing Vocabulary

Complete each sentence using each term once.

a.	social category	**g.**	social exchange
b.	social aggregate	**h.**	conformity
c.	primary group	**i.**	groupthink
d.	secondary group	**j.**	formal organization
e.	reference group	**k.**	bureaucracy
f.	social network	**l.**	rationalism

1. A _____ is an impersonal and goal-oriented group that involves only a segment of one's life.
2. A group of people who are in the same place at the same time is called _____.
3. A _____ is a web of social relationships that join a person to other people and groups.
4. A _____ is composed of people who are emotionally close, know one another well, and seek one another's company.
5. A situation in which pressures toward uniformity discourage members from expressing their reservations about group decisions is called _____.
6. A type of social interaction in which one person voluntarily does something for another, expecting a reward in return, is called _____.
7. _____ is behavior that goes according to group expectations.
8. A _____ is a group used for self-evaluation.
9. _____ are deliberately created to achieve one or more long-term goals.
10. A _____ is a formal organization based on efficiency and rationality.
11. The solution of problems on the basis of logic, data, and planning is called _____.
12. People who share a social characteristic are called a _____.

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Reviewing the Facts

1. Use the diagram below to list the basic societal functions of primary groups.

BASIC SOCIETAL FUNCTION OF PRIMARY GROUPS

2. List the major characteristics of primary and secondary groups.
3. What is the difference between a reference group and a social network?
4. What is the main difference between cooperation and social exchange?
5. Explain the relationship between in-groups and out-groups.

Thinking Critically

1. **Applying Concepts** Your high school is probably made up of many diverse in-groups. Identify some of these groups with their own labels, and then list common links joining all of the groups. Look for characteristics that the groups share, not for what separates them. For example, all members of the various groups might need to take two math classes in order to graduate. See how many items you can list that all the different groups share.
2. **Making Generalizations** Social networks are an important component of group interactions. Are there any people in your sociology class you would consider part of your social network? Are there any classmates who are part of your family, work, church, team, or neighborhood groups? Are the people that you sit next to closely related to your social network? Do these people have strong or weak ties to you? Are any of them among your best friends?
3. **Evaluating Information** Some high school administrators and educators have expressed concern that school violence is an indication that many high school groups are in conflict. Do you believe conflicts exist between the in-

groups in your school? Have these conflicts ever erupted or are they just below the surface? How could your school work to lessen any potential group conflicts?

4. **Analyzing Information** You read about social exchange, the type of interaction in which someone does something for another person and expects a reward in return. This might also be described as the "I'll scratch your back if you'll scratch mine" expectation. Do you think that this expectation is always present? Is it possible to perform truly random acts of kindness? If you have ever done volunteer work, haven't you done something with no reward expected?
5. **Making Inferences** The text discusses the issue of groupthink in the Kennedy administration. Have you ever been in a situation in which you disagreed with the majority opinion or felt that something that was about to happen was wrong? Did you speak up? If not, did the power of the group influence you? When might failing to speak up lead to harm?
6. **Making Comparisons** You are a member of a variety of informal groups—church, school clubs, work, sports, band, and so forth. Compare and contrast the roles of group membership in two of these groups.

Sociology Projects

1. **Formal and Informal Groups** Places such as teen centers, homeless shelters, food pantries, and crisis centers are all formal organizations established to help people. Sometimes these organizations are less bureaucratic than more official government aid agencies. Informal groups are often more apparent. Create a brochure that describes such social agencies in your neighborhood, city, or town. Identify as many agencies as you can, and list an address, phone number, and contact person for each. Then select one agency to call. Ask if you can interview someone who works there to get an idea of what the agency does. Ask him or her to describe the organization in terms of formality or informality. Ask about regulations, rules, and procedures. Does he or she think the procedures are gener-

ally helpful or a barrier to providing service? Create a special brochure on this organization alone. Share the results of your work with the social agency.

2. **Social Categories** In this activity, you will look at generations as social categories. Write down some of the things that you believe define your generation—for example, skateboarding, extreme sports, rap music, Gap clothes. Then find adults in their forties or early fifties and ask them to define their own generation. What were the things that identified their generation? What are the things that define them now? Each list should include about ten cultural items of that generation. Share your findings with the class. If possible, bring in some items that represent the two generations.

3. **Promotions According to Merit** The text discusses the major characteristics of a bureaucracy. One of these involves the principle of promoting people according to merit. Another principle, however, is that people are treated equally and not given special consideration or shown favoritism. In many organizations, merit is sometimes synonymous with seniority so that the length of time on the job becomes just as important or more important than the skill exercised in the job. Do an informal interview of six people who work for relatively large corporations or businesses to determine what role they think seniority should play in promotion decisions. Should a mediocre—but satisfactory—employee who has been with a company for many years be skipped over for a position in favor of an employee with much less time on the job, but who has demonstrated superior skill? Summarize the results of your interviews and be prepared to share your feelings with the class.

4. **Sexual Harassment in Schools** As you know, individual actions are linked to group and organizational norms. One of the emerging norms in all grades of school involves behaviors that could be interpreted as sexual harassment. Even very young children are being cautioned about comments and actions that could be interpreted as being sexist or being intimidating to one gender. Check with your school administration or guidance office to find out about the formal policy about sexual harassment in schools. What constitutes harassing behavior? Do you think your school has an effective policy to help prevent sexual harassment? Or do you think that sometimes the bureaucracy misinterprets behavior and assigns motivations that may not be intended?

5. **Reference Groups** Reread the section on reference groups. Then take a quick survey of ten or fifteen of your schoolmates. Ask them to identify their three most important reference groups. Compare the lists to see what groups show up most frequently. What are the norms and objectives of these most commonly cited groups?

6. **Groupthink** Using articles from the newspaper and magazines, find an article that is an example of groupthink. Using the article as a starting point, write a brief report that describes a model of group system in which the interactive roles of the individuals would have brought about a better outcome.

Technology Activities

1. *Dilbert* is a popular cartoon strip that makes fun of the bureaucratic structures in American corporations. Go to the *Dilbert* web site at http://www.unitedmedia.com/comics/dilbert and read several of the comic strips.

    1. Find a few cartoons that illustrate some important ideas presented in this chapter. Explain the cartoons in terms of knowledge gained in this chapter.
    2. Discuss some of the strips with an adult who works in a corporation. What does that person think about the accuracy of the situations portrayed in *Dilbert?*
    3. Prepare a brief report describing what you learned about formal organizations and bureaucracies from your review of *Dilbert*.

Chapter 6

Enrichment Reading
The McDonaldization of Society

by George Ritzer

George Ritzer defines McDonaldization as "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world" (Ritzer, 1996:1). Ritzer sees McDonaldization as an extension of Max Weber's theory of rationalization. (See p. 17 in Chapter 1.) For Weber, the industrial West was becoming increasingly rational—dominated by efficiency, predictability, calculability, and nonhuman technology. These features, in his view, were beginning to control human social behaviors.

Why has the McDonald's model proven so irresistible? Four **alluring** dimensions lie at the heart of the success of this model and, more generally, of McDonaldization. In short, McDonald's has succeeded because it offers consumers, workers, and managers efficiency, **calculability,** predictability, and control.

Efficiency　First, McDonald's offers *efficiency,* or the optimum method for getting from one point to another. For consumers, this means that McDonald's offers the best available way to get from being hungry to being satisfied. . . . Other institutions, fashioned on the McDonald's model, offer similar efficiency in losing weight, lubricating cars, getting new glasses or contacts, or completing income-tax forms. In a society where both parents are likely to work, or where there may be only a single parent, efficiently satisfying the hunger and many other needs of people is very attractive. In a society where people rush, usually by car, from one spot to another, the efficiency of a fast-food meal, perhaps even without leaving their cars by **wending** their way along the drive-through lane, often proves impossible to resist. The fast-food model offers people, or at least appears to offer them, an efficient method for satisfying many needs.

Calculability　Second, McDonald's offers *calculability,* or an emphasis on the quantitative aspects of products sold (portion size, cost) and service offered (the time it takes to get the product). Quantity has become equivalent to quality; a lot of something, or the quick delivery of it, means it must be good. As two observers of contemporary American culture put it, "As a culture, we tend to believe deeply that in general 'bigger is better.'"

Predictability　Third, McDonald's offers *predictability,* the assurance that their products and services will be the same over time and in all locales. The Egg McMuffin in New York will be, for all intents and purposes, identical to those in Chicago and Los Angeles. Also, those eaten next week or next year will be identical to those eaten today. There is great comfort in knowing that McDonald's offers no surprises. People know that the next Egg McMuffin they eat will taste about the same as the others they have eaten; it will not be awful, but it will not be exceptionally delicious, either. The success of the McDonald's

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What Does it Mean?

albeit
even though; although

alluring
attractive or fascinating

calculability
bring about by deliberate intent by controlling quantities

wending
traveling; proceeding on your way

Explain why you would expect service at this McDonald's restaurant in Guang Zhou, China, except for language, to be the same as the one in your neighborhood. Use sociological terms in your response.

model suggests that many people have come to prefer a world in which there are few surprises.

Control   Fourth, *control,* especially through the *substitution of nonhuman for human technology,* is exerted over the people who enter the world of McDonald's. A *human technology* (a screwdriver, for example) is controlled by people; a *nonhuman technology* (the assembly line, for instance) controls people. The people who eat in fast-food restaurants are controlled, **albeit** (usually) subtly. Lines, limited menus, few options, and uncomfortable seats all lead diners to do what management wishes them to do—eat quickly and leave. Further, the drive-through (in some cases walk-through) window leads diners to leave before they eat.

Source: Adapted from George Ritzer, *McDonaldization of Society,* rev. ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1996.

Read and React

1. State what Ritzer means by *McDonaldization.*
2. Since Ritzer contends that McDonaldization is spreading throughout modern society, he thinks you are affected by it. Describe a part of your social life, aside from eating at fast-food restaurants, that has been McDonaldized.
3. Describe your feelings about the McDonaldization you are experiencing.
4. Do you think McDonaldization is a rational or an irrational process? That is, does McDonaldization produce results that work for or against an organization's goal? Defend your answer.