The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together

Groupishness

The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together

Why this content might be relevant to you

- You might want to know more about the work of different teams you are a member of and how different membership configurations, working tasks or context seem to affect the ability of the team to complete its task(s) successfully
- You would like to know more about yourself in relation to others when working in teams
- You are working on developing more effective strategies for developing more diversity of thought and creativity in your teams.

The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together

Understanding Groupishness

- What is meant by *Groupishness:* Bion's theory of groups

- Working with groups and our identities in them

- Working with diversity and creativity in groups

- Summary of further resources to go deeper into the subject

The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together

Bion's theory of groups

Wilfrid Bion was one of a group scientists working at the beginning of the 20th century who informed the development of a social science that studied the person in the context of the group, shifting clinical practice and ultimately informing more organisational thinking.   His observations and study of groups brought with them a more democratic understanding of authority, leadership and role and were seminal in the development of organisational theory and practice.

The
IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together

Wilfrid Bion's theory of groups

- The role of authority

- How authority represents task

- The basic assumptions

- Tension between basic assumptions and work group

The IGUANA Project

Behaviour in groups results from

- **Emotions** driving the task at the expense of thinking
- **Thinking** at the expense of the emotions
- Losing sight of the **task**
- Trying to **control** change rather than **manage** it
- Loss of other critical **boundaries**

Defining the work group and its characteristics

The Work Group

Any group or team that has come together for the purpose of completing task, whether temporary or permanent.

Basic Assumption Group

Basic assumptions are 'as if' behaviours taken up by the group either in service or avoidance of the task the group is there to do. i.e the group behaves as if it were in conflict.

TASK and containment, structure

The work and task of the group is affected by time, territory and other structures like leadership. These are known as containment.

Emotions, Fantasies,
Anxiety transference

The internal life of the group is characterised by fears and fantasies often related to carrying out the task.

The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together

Basic Assumption (BA) behaviours

BA: Dependency

The group behaves <u>as if</u> it is there to be taken care of and given direction by one omnipotent individual.

BA: Pairing

The group behaves <u>as if</u> it is there to be saved from its irrational feelings by the coming together (bonding) of any two individuals or even sectors, which in turn will create something or someone that will take things in a new direction and provide hope.

BA: Fight/Flight

The group behaves <u>as if</u> it is there to avoid the anxiety of the task by either aggression or withdrawal. This often takes the form of bickering or absence.

Two new (BA) behaviours

BA: ONE-Ness

Group members come together as one, for the purpose of joining in a powerful union with an omnipotent force. They surrender themselves for passive participation and thereby feel well – being and wholeness. Members lose their thinking capacity and instead get filled up with a sense of being merged with each other. (Turquet, 1974)

BA: ME-Ness

The group behaves <u>as if</u> it is there to be saved from its irrational feelings by being a non-group. The fear of engulfment leads members to behave as if the only reality to be taken in is that of the individual. (Lawrence Bain Gould, 1996)

The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together

Basic Assumptions in the service of work or task (dependency, fight/flight, pairing)

BA: Dependency

Is sometimes appropriate in a learning situation, or in emergency situations where the costs of error are high and the person is new or inexperienced.

BA: Flight of Fight

Is frequently used to help individuals gather the strength to overcome obstacles such as a handicap, as well as to motivate groups in competitive situations.

BA: Pairing

Is a critical assumption in negotiations where the goal is to find common ground and solve problems, as opposed to bargain.

W
O
R
K

O
R

T
A
S
K

The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together
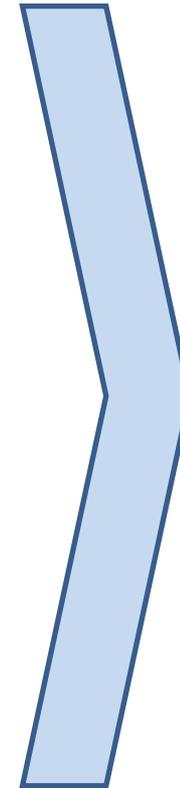
Basic Assumptions in the service of work or task

BA: ONE-ness

Is essential in work situation where autonomy and creativity are not required (i.e., working on a factory conveyor belt).

BA: ME-ness

Is essential in work situations where individual creativity and autonomy is required (i.e., in designing a prototype).
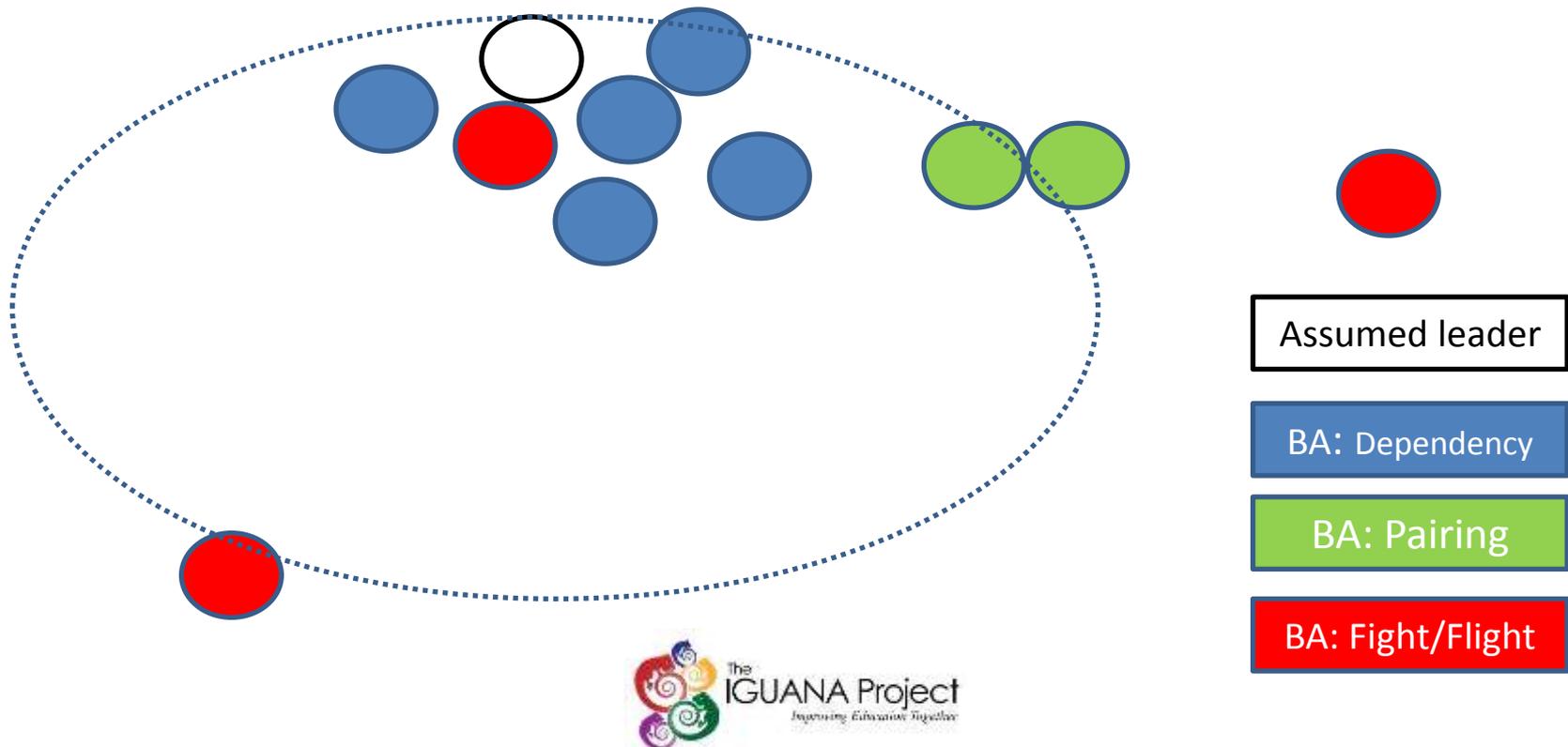
W
O
R
K

O
R

T
A
S
K

The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together
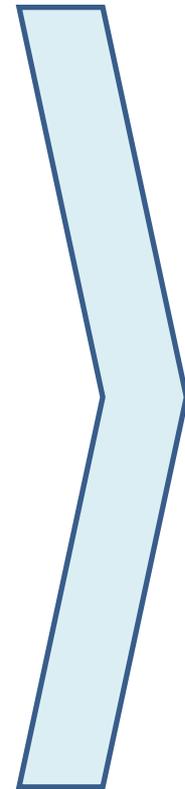
Valency is a predisposition to take up a particular role

Individuals within work groups will have a valency towards the different basic assumptions. Some towards a dependency on the leader, some to pairing, some to conflict, some to escape.

Assumed leader

BA: Dependency

BA: Pairing

BA: Fight/Flight

The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together

In summary working with groups in organisations requires

- The ability to experience and become aware of the irrational aspects of organisational life, both in self and in others.

- The ability to think about the meaning of those experiences to create an "understanding" and support groups in their primary task.

What does this mean in practice?

We need to understand our own and others behaviour in groups by:

- Learning how to distinguish ourselves from the system or the behaviour of the groups

- Becoming more aware of our and others' valencies

- Getting involved, taking action without getting lost

- By paying attention to what happens at the boundaries

The IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together

Questions for our practice

- To research the different and competing tasks of different workgroups in the school
- Are the different tasks recognised and supported accordingly?
- How do we notice behaviour when these groups are working 'on' and 'off' task?
- What strategies can we develop to support and maintain the diversity and creativity of working groups?
- What are the external factors that affect working groups and how can we maintain an awareness of them?

The
IGUANA Project
Improving Education Together