Chapter Activities

# Chapter 5: Interaction, Groups, and Organizations: Connections That Work

## Do You Know Who I Know?

**Objective:** This activity is intended to get students to see how socially connected they are to one another. It also allows them to test Milgram’s Six Degrees Theory.

**Directions:** Assign your students to random groups with roughly six members. Then give them 10–20 minutes to find out how many friends or acquaintances they have in common (it must be individuals they personally know and interact with—not famous individuals or cultural icons that everyone will “know”). The group should keep a list of individuals they name and a tally of how many of the group members know the individual. For each individual that more than one member of the group knows, the group will get a point for each member that knows the individual. The group with the most points at the end of the activity wins (although no reward needs to be attached to winning).

Instructors can use this activity to discuss the reality of the “small world” hypothesis. It can also be used to discuss groups and statuses, because the students should quickly discover that, if they realize groups and organizations they have in common, it will more easily lead them to common acquaintances. This activity will highlight the role of groups in developing social networks.

**Note to Instructors:** It is crucial to this activity that students do not self-select into groups.

## Construction of Reality

**Objective:** This activity is designed to help students understand how reality is socially constructed.

**Directions**: Create some real-life scenarios and ask the students to write down how they would handle each scenario, and then ask various students to share with the class. The responses will vary from student to student. Explain to the students that reality is constructed differently for each individual based on their life experiences.

## Presentation of (the Virtual) Self in Everyday Life

**Objective:** This activity will encourage a discussion of impression management in real life and online.

**Directions:** Prior to the day you do this activity, ask each of your students to prepare a 1- to 3-minute presentation addressing the question, “Who am I?” Then, during the next class, instructors will ask students to compare their presentation to the way they answer “Who am I?” on their Facebook or Instagram profile. You can do this activity in groups or as a class, if students are willing to share their profiles with their colleagues and instructor. This activity should engage students in a discussion of impression management and face work. Instructors could also use this activity to discuss the role of the Internet in social interaction. It could also lead to an ethical debate about whether college admissions counselors, employers, and faculty should use these profiles to evaluate students and employees (a practice becoming very common, especially in the business world).

**Note to Instructors:** To complete this activity, instructors will need a computer and a projector or students will need computer access. Also, not all individuals will have a profile on networking websites but the majority of your students should (based on the authors’ experience with their classes).

## Visualizing Social Networks

**Objective:** This activity should get students thinking about their social networks and the networking opportunities available to them because of their network.

**Directions:** Give each student a piece of graph paper. Then ask them to list as many individuals they know and can think of in 5–15 minutes down the rows (they will need another 5–15 minutes to make the same list across the columns). Have them mark a 1 in the cell if the individuals at the intersection know one another and a 0 if they do not. Then have each student attempt to draw their social network. By drawing their social networks, students should see the benefits they could get from networking. You could then discuss if students realized the extent of their social networks. You could also discuss if their networks consist of more individuals they are connected to through primary or secondary group membership and the implications this has on their ability to network.

## Bureaucratic Structure in Your College or University

**Objective:** This activity is intended to get your students to see their college or university as a bureaucracy and a formal organization.

**Directions:** Either in groups or as a class, have your students list all the departments and organizations (or services) that they can think of in your college or university. Then have your students discuss the ways that the departments and organizations interact with one another to have them visualize the organizational structure of the college or university. Also have them think of list the departments and organizations they interacted with to be a student this quarter or semester. This activity should lead to a discussion of the role of bureaucracy and formal organizations. Instructors should ask students whether they had previously viewed the college or university as a formal organization or a bureaucracy. They should also talk about the benefits and the problems created by the college or university bureaucracy.

## Create Your Own Formal Organization

**Objective:** Completing this activity should lead your students to think about the costs and benefits of bureaucracies and alternative organizational structures.

**Directions:** Have your students create the ideal organizational structure of a workplace or a university. Then have them compare and contrast the workplace or university they create to their current workplace or university. What problems might there be with the ideal structure they created? What problems exist in the current organization that will be solved by the new organizational structure? This activity should also lead to a discussion of ideal-type bureaucracy and the ability of alternative organizational structures to solve the problems associated with current bureaucracies.

## Groups in Our Social World

**Objective:** This activity is intended to get students to realize the salience of groups in their everyday lives.

**Directions:** Give students 5–15 minutes to make a list of all the groups and organizations they belong to. Then ask them to go through and label each group as a primary or secondary group. Then ask them to list the statuses and roles they have in each group. This activity can lead to discussion about the salience of groups in society. Instructors can also use the activity to discuss the importance of primary and secondary groups in students’ lives. Instructors can also discuss role strain and role conflict and formal and informal statuses in relation to students’ social worlds.

## The Difference Between Role Strain and Role Conflict

**Objective:** This activity will allow students to understand the difference between role strain and role conflict and to recognize potential role strain and role conflict in their own lives.

**Directions:** Have students list the demands of the role of college student. Have them read some of the demands out loud to the class so everyone understands how complex the role is. Then have them discuss examples of role strain.

Next have them list other roles that they occupy in addition to being a college student. Ask for students to share some of the roles they occupy and examples of role conflict between that particular role and being a college student they have experienced.

## Technology Transforms Society

**Objective:** Students will be able to determine the effects of technology.

**Directions:** When discussing how technology is the key to transforming societies, put students in small groups and provide them the following scenario: Imagine what might happen if a group of modern-day anthropologists visited a hunting and gathering society in a remote jungle of Central Africa and accidentally left behind the following objects: a flashlight, a transistor radio, a moped, a keg of beer, and a small arsenal of guns. Considering each object, one by one, how might that object transform the society as well as change its members’ social interactions and relationships? You can change up the different items if you want, such as book of matches, cell phone, tablet, laptop, or any other modern items.

## Understanding Goffman’s Dramaturgy

**Objective:** To understand how we go through “front-stage” and “back-stage” behavior in our daily lives.

**Directions:** Have students list out everything they did yesterday (or if they stayed in all day yesterday—the last day they went out). Then have them determine what was “back stage” and what was “front stage.” How did they act differently depending on what stage they were occupying?

You can expand on this if students hold jobs in restaurants or retail stores to discuss how they go between front and back stage in a shift at work.

## Visualizing Your Social Network in Groups

**Objective:** To visually understand how many groups we are a part of and the way these groups form our social networks.

**Directions:** Give each student a blank piece of paper and have them draw a small circle in the middle with their name in it. Then have them fill the paper with all the groups they are a part of it. If the group is a primary group, then the circle should be closer to their name, a secondary group should be farther away. They can even change the size of the circle depending on the importance. Have the student then connect groups with lines if members from one group connect to members of another group. This can be expanded further by having students list on the back reference groups.