Change Process of Group Norms with Generational Change in a Small Group

Miki Ozeki

Abstract

Group norms are often revised or changed, although consistency and stability are desired when considering group management. The current study aimed to explore the process of group norm change by analyzing the minutes of meetings. Meeting minutes were coded by a psychologist and two graduate students of psychology. A total of 12 categories were identified: “Express determination in changing constitution”, “Ideal constitution,” “Informing current situation” “Changes from the past,” “Questions,” “Resolution of question by explanation,” “Statements for improvements” “Personal opinions,” “Understanding/agreements,” “Consents” “Conclusions,” and “Suspensions.” The results of the current study demonstrated that 1) central group members’ perceptions of the gap between their ideals and the current situation led to a change in group norms in order to realize their ideals, and 2) group members changed the group norms taking into consideration the norms that had been passed down by former members and those that they would hand over to future members.

Keywords: Group norm, change process, group

Introduction

Group norms are shared among group members and provide a measure of members’ behaviors and judgments; they are also essential for group management (Forsyth, 2010). Group norms are treated as given and stable in most studies (Cialdini & Trost, 1998), and are expected to be sustainable on a long-term basis. This standpoint also requires that group norms not be influenced simply by changes of generation. Lave and Wenger’s (1991) theory of legitimate peripheral participation and Levin and Moreland’s (1994) group developmental model confirm this perspective, which claims that group norms are reproductively sustained by newcomers learning the existing group norms. Nevertheless, in small groups, certain group norms sometimes have been shown to change together with generational changes in its members (Ozeki & Yoshida, 2012; Yamada, 2012). Thus, these studies offer the important perspective that group norms are changeable.

The current study aimed to reveal the change process of group norms and intention to change them. Change or revision of group norms does not necessarily improve group performance (Bowen, Rostami, & Steel, 2010), but instead can sometimes create conflict among group members (Andersen, 2006). Maintaining a group norm and transmitting it to the following generation may be less costly than changing it. Understanding the process and background of change of group norms is important for group management.
How to capture the process of group norm change

Group norms are divided into written norms and norms regulated by desirable behaviors or judgments in a given situation. Changes to written group norms are evidenced by changes to the relevant documentation. Using the meeting minutes of discussions to change group norms can be helpful to understand the background and process of change.

Changes to group norms that are regulated by desirable behaviors or judgments in a given situation are captured in two ways: 1) the behaviors or judgments of group members come to converge in a certain way through mutual adjustment or attunement (Asch, 1952), and 2) individuals change their beliefs concerning a certain group norm. In both patterns, it is difficult to capture exactly when the group norm changes and the reason for this change.

In the first case described above, the behaviors of group members come to converge due to their fear of being excluded as deviant because of behaving differently from other members (Eidelman, Silvia, & Biernat, 2006). Consequently, their patterns of behavior converge in a certain way, and subsequently become a descriptive group norm (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). However, this explanation of the change process does not indicate the moment when a group norm changes and why a new pattern is adopted. This makes it inappropriate to target this type of group norm in a study aiming to explain the reasons for group norm changes.

An example of the second pattern described above is as follows. A critic (Paluck, 2009) of Staub and Pearlman (2009) insisted that prejudice as a social norm had changed due to radio education. Paluck (2009) criticized Staub and Pearlman’s (2009) data for only showing changes in individuals’ beliefs underpinning a social norm, which do not necessarily indicate a change in the social norm itself. Paluck (2009) pointed out that shared beliefs among group members are essential if those beliefs are to constitute a group norm (Forsyth, 2010), but Staub and Pearlman (2009) did not show to what extent individuals shared these beliefs. This example demonstrates the difficulties in targeting individuals’ beliefs as a group norm and the process of changing these beliefs. Group norms based on beliefs change gradually, which also makes it difficult to identify when the group norm changes.

Yamada (2012) suggested that a group norm is changed easily through a generational change in a small formal group. Intergenerational succession patterns of cooperative activity within a university seminar were found to show seven patterns as follows (Yamada, 2012). “Straight-ahead succession” is a pattern whereby a successive generation continues to function in exactly the same way as the previous generation. In the pattern of “Developmental succession,” the successive generation uses the same norm as the previous generation but tries to redevelop it based on a current model. In the “Unintended succession” pattern, a successive generation tries to change the norm but passes the change down to the next generation in a way different from their intention. In the “Succession and improvement” pattern, the successive generation improves the manner of cooperative activities differently from the previous generation. In “Failure of succession,” the successive generation uses the same norm as the previous generation, and attempts to pass it down but fails. In the “Not succeeded” pattern, the mode of performing cooperative activities is unsuccessful. Finally, the “Penetration of cultural value” pattern represented that members’ perception that the climate of the group has succeeded by cooperative activities. In the work by Yamada (2012), “Not succeeded” and “Succession and improvement” accounted for 50% of total succession of group norms, which means that 50% of group norms changed.

In the study by Yamada (2012), the time when the group norm changed was identified, as late generation members responded in interviews that they had changed the rules or modes of activities in their generation. However, there remained two limitations in the work by Yamada (2012) in considering change of group norms. One limitation
is that the extent to which members shared the “Penetration of cultural value” was not mentioned. This makes it
unknown whether or not the content of the cultural value constituted a group norm, because “Penetration of cultural
value” is simply a member’s subjective perception of the climate within a group. Another limitation is that the
reason or process of change was not explained, as Yamada’s (2012) aim was to describe patterns of intergenerational
succession and reproduction of group norms.

The identification of the time of and reason for the change of unwritten group norms requires the declaration of a
new norm, which is then shared among group members, according to Paluck (2009) and Yamada (2012). By targeting
a case where there is a declaration of change, the change process of a group norm and the reason for this change can
be explained by examining the process of declaration. Hence, it is important to examine a process until a new group
norm is presented, whether that group norm is written or unwritten.

**Change process of group norms in a small group**

According to the work by Ozeki and Yoshida (2012) and Yamada (2012), the change process of a group norm in a
small group proceeds in a four-step manner: conflict, change, discussion, and rooting of the new norm. In the conflict
stage, the current core generation queries the climate of the group and the group norm in previous generations. They
have complaints, but cannot share them because they do not have sufficient power to effect change. In the change
stage, they have gained power to manage the group according to their own will and to change the norm to solve the
problems that they have queried. At this moment, they can change the group norm easily in a top-down fashion as
long as they reach a consensus for the change. To achieve this, they may hold a meeting to create a consensus about
changing the group norm and create a new norm in the next step, the discussion stage. Examining the discussion
at this stage reveals the change process of group norms as mentioned previously. Having reached an agreement to
change a group norm, the central group members inform all group members of the new group norm and demand that
all members observe it. The change process of the group norm comes to an end when the new group norm takes root
in the group.

**Aim of the current study**

The current study aimed to reveal the change process of group norms through content analysis of minutes of
meetings regarding the change of written group norms. Content analysis of meeting minutes enables the change
process to be captured without the influence of memory changes of target group members, as well as the description
of how group norms are changed at the group level.

**Method**

The target of content analysis was the minutes of the meetings taking place in 2013 to change the “Constitution
of X university festival: For an ideal university festival,” which was the constitution of X university festival and
consisted of three parts: “Ideal university festival in X university,” “Organizational philosophy of X university
festival staff,” and “Constitution of X university festival staff.” Five articles were included in the first part, referring
to the orientation and purpose of X university festival. “Organizational philosophy of X university festival staff”
referred to the organizational philosophy in five articles. “Constitution of X university staff” included forty-
three articles, which referred to the definitions and procedures of organizational configurations, offices, members,
information management, accountants, and cooperative groups.

Approximately 100 university students participate in X university festival staff organization annually. Half of the staff quit every year, while the other half remains. Top staff need to be members of the organization for two to three years. New top staff can opt to use the original “Constitution of X university festival: For the ideal university festival” as it was the previous year, or revise it and create a new one. Nine university students who were the top staff of the year 2013 held constitution revision meetings seven times before recruiting new members in 2013. The original constitution, which was created in these meetings, became the “Constitution of X university festival: For the ideal university festival 2013” by approval at a later general meeting. The targets of content analysis in this study were the minutes of the seven constitution revision meetings.

The minutes of the constitution revision meetings consisted of the following seven documents. All documents were written by a top staff member of the year 2013. The first meeting minutes were written by staff member Y and the others were written by staff member M.

Document 1 comprised the minutes of a meeting held on 13 January 2013. Precise statements from each member, except agendas and conclusions, were written in the form of conversation and approximated what each member said.

Document 2 comprised the minutes of a meeting held on 13 January 2013, but the date was not recorded. The format was almost identical to that used in Document 1, but the names of the speakers were not noted.

Document 3 comprised the minutes of a meeting held on 2 February 2013. Its format was almost identical to that of Document 2, but some statements were summarized. The statements and conversation flow provided a more complete picture of the meeting.

Document 4 comprised the minutes of a meeting held on 8 February 2013. Its format was almost identical to that of Document 2.

Document 5 comprised the minutes of a meeting held on 11 February 2013. Its format was almost identical to that of Document 3.

Document 6 comprised the minutes of a meeting held on 14 February 2013. This document was simply a summary.

Document 7 comprised the minutes of a meeting held on 17 February 2013. Its format was almost identical to that of Document 3.

The total number of statements in each meeting is shown in the “Total” column of Table 1.

The constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2003, 2006) was applied to the content analysis of the seven documents. Firstly, initial coding was conducted for each statement in Document 1 through discussion between two graduate students of psychology and the author. The agreement rate was approximately 70%. The remaining statements were re-coded based on this discussion. At this stage, the unit of coding was the statement, and each statement was assigned a code based on the speaker’s intention. The codes created in the analysis of Document 1 were then used for the analysis of the other six meeting minutes. The two graduate students and the author discussed and coded each statement. New codes were generated when existing codes seemed inappropriate. This procedure was conducted for the remaining five documents. In Document 6, codes were only assigned to each paragraph because its format differed from that used in the other six documents. Codes were used as labels, as indicated in the constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2003, 2006). Subsequently, some codes were collated as upper-level categories based on similarity, through discussion between the two graduate students and the author.
Results

Generation of categories and their contents

A total of 18 labels were produced by coding. The names of the labels are as follows: “Express determination in changing constitution”, “Image of ideal constitution”, “Aspirations,” “Informing current situation,” “Changes from the past,” “Questions on word meanings,” “Questions on current constitution,” “Questions to other members,” “Questions on current organization,” “Questions to their own direction,” “Word interpretations,” “Clarifications,” “Proposals,” “Necessity,” “Indications,” “Objections,” “Assertions,” “Personal feelings,” “Understanding/agreements,” “Consents,” “Conclusions,” and “Suspensions.” The contents of the labels were as follows (Table 1).

Table 1 Appearance Rate of Each Category in Each Document

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Express determination in changing constitution</td>
<td>Express determination in changing constitution</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal constitution</td>
<td>Image of ideal constitution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspiration</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informing current situation</td>
<td>Informing current situation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes from the past</td>
<td>Changes from the past</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Questions on word meanings</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions on current constitution</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions to other members</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions on current organization</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions on their own direction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution of question by explanation</td>
<td>Clarifications</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Word interpretations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statements for improvement</td>
<td>Proposals</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Necessity</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indications</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal opinions</td>
<td>Objections</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assertions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal feelings</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding/agreement</td>
<td>Understanding/agreement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consents</td>
<td>Consents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td>Suspensions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>364</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change process of group norms

239
Express determination in changing constitution Statements refer to the purpose of creating a new constitution. “We shall understand, hold, and pass on to the next generations what have been handed down from one generation to another. We must also develop a new constitution that suits the current situation.” (Document 1) Image of ideal constitution. Statements refer to the beliefs and ideals of the constitution, university festival, and university festival organization.

“We must uphold what people comprehend as the characteristics of X university. What we are doing is not just an event.” (Document 2) Aspiration Statements refer to speakers’ aspirations, and demands for a constitution. “I want to put somewhere in it the leader’s words that the university festival has our own characteristics.” (Document 1)

“I want to insert the sentence that we are responsible for it. I mean, we do not only do management. For example, if we notice any distortion, we never leave it.” (Document 5)

“It is ideal for all groups to get together and stimulate each other.” (Document 2)

Informing current situation Statements referring to the current situation of the university festival organization and procedures. (Referring to the fact that the leaders were approved by a majority) “They have been approved by applause.” (Document 1) “When we were re-arranging articles, major changes of article 3 that were put on hold by the members of ‘09 were found.” (Document 6)

“Anyway, this part was changed by the members of 2009.” (Document 3)

“Originally, only the leader was there. When they add an article about the sub-leaders and chiefs, they must also be added without approval.” (Document 7)

Questions on word meanings. Statements asking for definitions or meanings of words in the constitution.

“What is the definition of ‘the university as a whole’?” (Document 1)

“What is the difference between ‘・’ and ‘、’?” (Document 2)

Questions on current constitution. Statements expressing questions and doubts regarding the current constitution.

“‘The last day’ is in it, but why didn’t they state it clearly?” (Document 1)

“Is the reason why they didn’t use the word ‘election’ because they thought of situations you have to deal with quickly?” (Document 7)

Questions to other members. Statements querying statements by other members.

“Which is better?” (Document 1)

“Is that because the broadcasting club is a cooperative group?” (Document 1)

Questions on current organization. Statements querying the significance of existence of departments in the organization.

“Did the Department of Development1 solve problems?” (Document 1)

“Who or which department in this organization requests anything from this department?” (Document 1)

Questions on their own direction. Statements querying what they do and their purposes.

“I worry that what we are deciding now makes our general meeting less influential.” (Document 1)

“I wonder if this is an ideal constitution for members.” (Document 2)

Word interpretations. Statements explaining meanings or interpretation of words in constitution.

“‘Abstention’ is not included in the whole count, but it is included in the general meeting.” (Document 1)

“‘Decision’ means passing a meeting, and ‘resolution’ means a meeting expressing their will.” (Document 1)
Clarifications. Statements providing clear and detailed explanations, vague descriptions in the current constitution, and the situation of the organization.

“A notice of withdrawal is accepted when the administrator of general service reads the email of withdrawal and accepts it, not when the email has been sent.” (Document 1)

“The reason why the power of referendum and entry is given to the department of general service is based on the rule of personnel-management in a constitution.” (Document 4)

Proposals. Statements showing an idea of change.

“Then, how about letting the draft be made?” (Document 1)

“How about establishing a department of personnel-management?” (Document 5)

Necessity. Statements referring to the necessity of contents, words, and procedures in the constitution.

“We have to present a description of ‘ideal university festival’ on the top of the constitution.” (Document 1)

“Are the words ‘stipulated in Article 19’ in Article 25, paragraph 3 unnecessary? (Document 4)

Indications. Statements indicating problems of current constitution and other members’ statements.

“The constitution is not the best way to show the outside the ideals and philosophy of X university festival.” (Document 1)

“No rules for leaders!” (Document 4)

“Personal data are in danger.” (Document 5)

Objections. Statements objecting to other members.

(To the statements proposing the creation of a Department of Personnel-Management) “Actually, gathering some people does not solve the problem because one person can do this task.” (Document 5)

“No way!” (Document 7)

Assertions. Statements asserting a speaker’s opinions or ideas to other members.

“I dare not using the word ‘personnel-management.’ It includes controlling.” (Document 5)

“This does not give power; it does give responsibilities!” (Document 7)

Personal feelings. Statements concerning personal feelings, and sometimes wandering off topic.

“I felt a little doubt.” (Document 1)

“The more we understand the constitution, the more we can put our will into this committee.” (Document 1)

“I looked into the organizational laws, but found them uncertain. lol” (Document 4)

Understanding/agreement. Statements agreeing with a member who has spoken previously.

“I think so, too” (Document 1)

“You are right.” (Document 1)

Consents. Statements confirming the understanding and ideas of other members, and the current situation.

“Now we have reached a conclusion concerning ‘Organizational philosophy (1), (3), and (4),’ right?” (Document 3)

“Making someone chief solves the problem, right?” (Document 5)

Conclusions. Statements showing the conclusion.

“‘Organizational philosophy (2)’ is deleted once, and it is going to be included in ‘Ideal university festival (3)’.” (Document 3)

“‘Impeachment of board members’ is changed to ‘Impeachment of leaders, sub-leaders, and managers’.” (Document 6)

Suspensions. Statements showing that the theme was carried over to the next meeting for failing to reach a
conclusion.

“Let this problem be decided by next year’s members” (Document 1)

“It seems we have too much argument, so we will discuss them later.” (Document 1)

“Confused, pending” (Document 4)

“Aspirations” and “Image of ideal constitution” were gathered into an upper-level category named “Ideal constitution.” Similarly, “Questions on word meanings,” “Questions on current organization,” “Questions to other members,” “Questions on current constitution,” and “Questions on their own direction” were collated in the category “Question.” “Word interpretations” and “Clarification” were collated in “Resolution of question by explanation.” “Proposal,” “Indications,” and “Necessity” were collated in “Statements for improvements.” “Personal feelings,” “Assertions,” and “Objections” were collated in “Personal opinions.” The remaining labels were used as upper-level categories and were not collated.

Time Sequence Shift of Appearance Rate of Each Category

The proportions of each category to all statements in each meeting are shown in Table 1. The target documents of analysis were created by university students, so the format of meeting minutes was not unified among meetings. Only the conclusions of the sixth meeting were written in Document 6. Each member’s statement was written in the form of conversation in Documents 1, 2, and 5. Each member’s statement and the process of discussion were described in Documents 3, 4, and 7, but less precisely than in Documents 1, 2, and 5. These made the appearance rate of one statement in relation to all statements high in Document 6.

“Express determination in changing constitution” only appeared in Document 1. “Ideal constitution” was referred to a great deal in the beginning of meetings, and then gradually decreased. This was similarly the case for “Resolution of question by explanation.” In particular, “Word interpretations” appeared more frequently in Documents 1 and 2 than the other documents, and almost corresponded to the frequency of “Questions on word meanings.”

“Questions” tended to appear in the first and second meetings and decreased in later meetings. This trend was particular to “Questions on current organization,” “Questions to other members,” and “Questions on word meanings.” “Questions on current constitution” and “Questions to their own direction” appeared throughout all meetings.

The sub-labels of “Personal opinions” differed in their appearance tendency. “Personal feelings” appeared in meeting minutes as meaningful words when concrete ideas were proposed, or in the first and second meetings, but not in the remaining meetings. “Assertions” and “Objections” appeared throughout all meetings.

As for “Statements for improvements,” “Indications” appeared most in the first meeting, decreased in the second meeting, but increased once more in the third meeting. “Indication” was the most frequent of all labels in the seven meetings. “Proposal” also tended to increase at the midpoint of the seven meetings.

“Understanding/agreement” appeared in the early meetings, and “Consent” increased in frequency as the meetings progressed. “Statements for improvements” and “Consent” increased together.

“Changes from the past” appeared quite frequently, but its appearance rate was mostly consistent from the first to final meeting.

“Conclusion” decreased once in the middle and then increased again to the final meeting. “Suspension” appeared from the first meeting to the middle meetings.
Discussion

The results demonstrated that a change in group norm was the product of group members’ aspirations to accomplish their ideals. This was suggested by the fact that the first statement of Document 1 was categorized into “Express determination to change constitution,” and “Image of ideal constitution” was mainly observed in the second meeting and then decreased in frequency. The statement “but it does not match the current situation” (Document 1) represented how the conflict between the current situation and the existing norm could be a reason for change in the group norm. “Question” was frequently observed in the first and second meetings, and then decreased. This trend might have been caused by members’ incomplete understanding of the current constitution or a perceived gap between their ideals, the current situation, and the current constitution. This suggests that the reason for change in group norms in a small group might be the perception of central group members of a gap between their ideals and the current situation.

The discussions in the first and second meetings focused on a re-examination of the current constitution. “Informing current situation” was observed at the beginning of the first meeting, but did not appear in later meetings. “Questions” and “Resolution of question by explanation” displayed the same tendency, and so did “Indication.” In some of the first meetings, group members confirmed the current situation, answered questions, and then considered problems in the current constitution and their own ideas for changing it. The more meetings they had, the more ideas they proposed.

“Personal feelings” was particularly evident in Document 1. In the first meeting, such minor statements were significant, as they represented each member’s thoughts. Such individual statements are usually omitted in formal documents; however, they were kept in the target documents. Nonetheless, they might have been recorded because emotional sharing among group members sometimes plays a role in positive outcomes (Rhee, 2006). Concrete discussions about changing the constitution began following process. “Question” decreased gradually, while indication of problems and proposals increased. By repeating this process, a new version of the constitution could be created.

Discussions were conducted by confirming members’ understanding and agreement after certain meetings, which implied that the appearance rate of “Consents” increased together with that of “Statements for improvements.” The reason why “Question” increased again in Document 7 was that members queried each others’ statements, not the current constitution.

Figure 1 represents the discussion process model to change group norms based on the current data.

Group members expressed their ideals and determination to change the constitution before discussion of change or revision. In the first stage, the current constitution was re-examined. Some members queried articles and words in the constitution, while other members explained them. They concluded some issues, and those remaining were the target of discussions in subsequent meetings. At the same time, some members confirmed the current situation of the organization.

In the following stage, concrete discussions for revising the constitution commenced based on the discussions in the first stage. At this point, members proposed concrete ideas on discussion issues rather than providing explanations. Members spoke more actively, and each asserted their own opinions regarding the revision. Some issues were also postponed to subsequent meetings. The statements in this stage had much in common with the group decision-making model. For example, group members gave their opinions the most during group discussions for
group decision-making (Bales, 1999). Hence, the change of a group norm is considered to be a product of the ideals of group members, but finally becomes a product of group decision-making.

**Resistance to change and considering past and future members**

Members who attended the meetings seemed to understand that they had the right to change the constitution and that future members would, in turn, also do so. They also had in mind that they were creating a new constitution taking past members’ heritage into consideration, and aimed to hand their constitution down to future members. This attitude was implied in statements such as “We shall understand, hold, and pass down to the next generations what have been handed down from one generation to another” and “We have to think of this in every meeting for the future constitution.” These statements suggest that group norms were changed by considering the handing down of a new group norm to the future generation, and not just as a means to accomplish their ideals. Moreover, the statement “Let this problem be decided by next year’s members” represented their intention to leave to younger members what they could not achieve. This differs somewhat from the standpoint of organizational innovation studies, as the organizational innovation model suggests that the change process often starts with rejecting the current situation and ends with developing a new organization (Dixon, Meyer, & Day, 2010). Changing group norms is often accompanied by the possibility of drastic change in the current group. In this regard, changing group norms is relatively similar to organizational innovation. However, in the current study, group members did not ignore or reject what was passed down to them by past members, and also considered the future generation, who would receive their group norms. Thus, these findings demonstrate what most organizational innovation studies have failed to identify.

Changing a constitution implies destroying the legitimacy of the group, and may cause dread in group members, who may hesitate to change or revise the group norm. Some statements in the meeting minutes, such as “We cannot change after knowing the past and the intentions of past members,” “If we understand the will of the people and university authorities who brought back the university festival, we cannot re-arrange them,” “It is dreadful to change what has been kept. Should we conserve them?” and “I will ask a competent person because we cannot change it on our own responsibility,” reflected the group members’ psychological resistance to changing the constitution.

Although group members aspired to create a new organization by changing the constitution, they were
apprehensive regarding whether the direction that they were taking was correct, as shown by the appearance of “Questions on their own direction” in Documents from 1 to 7. Changing what had been right within a group meant rejecting the group legitimacy and also denying their social identity within their group (King & Whetten, 2008). This mechanism generated psychological resistance to self-denial accompanied by denial of their social identity.

Respect is another factor that could generate psychological resistance to changing a constitution. Respect relates to support or subversion of authority (Haidt, 2012), and includes ought-respect and awe mingled with fear (Muto, 2016). There is psychological resistance to changing or denying what has been received from seniors if these seniors are respected. The statement “I will ask a competent person because we cannot change it on our own responsibility” is considered an example of this mechanism.

**Limitations**

The target documents of analysis in the current study were less formal than meeting minutes taken in organizations, governments, and parliaments. They were written by university students, and their format differed between writers. Meeting dates were recorded, but times were not.

The method employed in the current study, i.e., content analysis of the statements of meeting minutes, did not allow the examination of the personal psychological processes of group members, as some statements might have been omitted from the meeting minutes. In addition, statements made at meetings might not have perfectly reflected members’ real thoughts, as all the target members of the current study occupied leading positions in X university festival staff organization. However, the target members of the current study were all university students with several years’ experience as members of the festival staff organization, and their age did not differ greatly. Hence, factors inhibiting free statements, such as differences in position and hierarchical relations (Grambrill, 1995), would not have influenced the meetings.

**Implications for further research**

The finding of the current study that group members changed their group norms in consideration of the legacy to future generations introduces a new viewpoint that differs from studies conducted according to Lave and Wenger’s (1991) legitimate peripheral participation and Levin and Moreland’s (1994) group developmental model.

The current study showed that 1) central group members’ perception of the gap between ideals and the current situation led them to change group norms in order to realize their ideals, and 2) group members changed their group norms in consideration of the norms that they had inherited from past members and those that they would hand down to future members.

However, this study examined the process of changing group norms at the group level by analyzing meeting minutes, which did not allow for the examination of intra-personal processes of each member during the meetings.

Based on the two findings and the limitation indicated above, an examination of the personal factors that motivate people to pass on group norms to the next generation might lead to the discovery of a mechanism that explains how current societies have been created throughout history.

**Footnote**

1. The Department of Development was a sub-department of X university festival organization. Its purpose was to challenge the problems in X university festival and accomplish the ideal university festival. To achieve this, staff
in this department planned and managed events.

References


