



# EIGHT GROUP VIBES

**A Descriptive Typology  
of Group Mood**

by Alev Sönmez, Pieter Desmet &  
Natalia Romero Herrera

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A Descriptive Typology of Group Mood (2nd Edition)  
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# Introduction

When working in a group with a collective purpose, whether to generate creative ideas, develop a project plan, or pursue any other goal, we generally aim for fruitful interactions, pleasant collaborations and effective outcomes. In some group meetings, the atmosphere seems just right, and everyone is on the same page. Yet, at other times there can be a reluctant or a tense feeling in the air that stands in the way of effective collaboration. This feeling in the air is what is called group mood. Often referred to as a group vibe in colloquial English, group mood is the general emotional atmosphere during a group activity (Sönmez, Desmet, Romero Herrera, *in press*, p. X).

## Design for group mood

Experiencing ‘good group vibes’ can improve group dynamics and communication, this way contributing to both performance and wellbeing at work. Products and services have great potential to facilitate constructive and pleasant group moods in professional settings. Yet, to design for group mood, we first need to understand the experience.

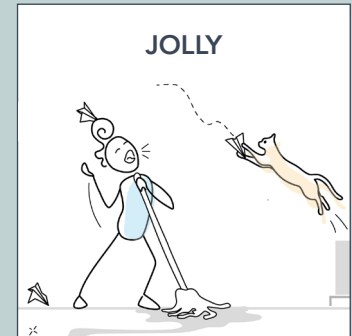
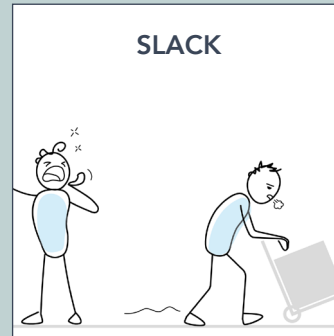
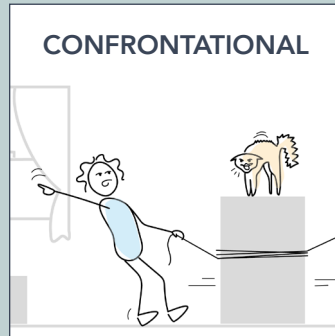
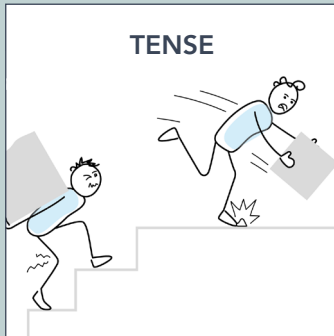
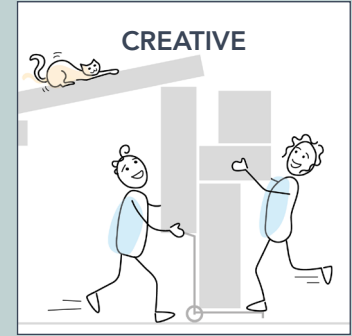
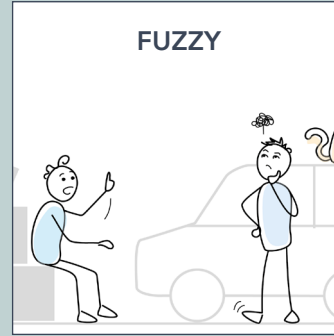
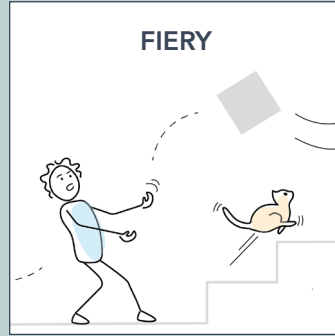
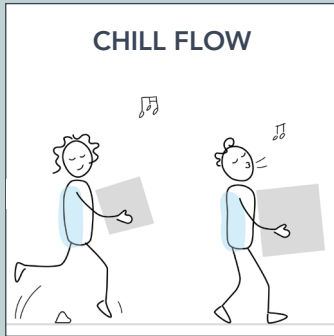
## The eight group mood repertoire

This booklet describes eight types of group mood: chill flow, fiery, fuzzy, creative, tense, confrontational, slack and jolly. The descriptions provide a granular, holistic and experience-oriented understanding of group mood. The booklet can serve as a source for detecting and empathising with different group moods, as well as for identifying and imagining the type that needs to be facilitated. It can also be used within teams to start a dialogue about group-mood-related issues.

The eight group moods were observed in small workgroups where members collaborate to achieve a shared goal (e.g. a design team working on a prototype, or a managing team having a planning meeting). There may be new types to be discovered in different professional settings or recreational group activities. We envision our typology as an initial step towards a growing repertoire of group moods.

Note that the eight group moods are described as archetypes: they describe extreme manifestations. In real life, groups can experience milder or combined versions of these types.

# Overview



# Descriptions

Each group mood is represented by keywords, a colloquial expression, an illustration and a descriptive text.

## Keywords

A unique set of qualities provide a quick overview of a group mood.

## Colloquial expression

A metaphor or colloquial expression provides an intuitive understanding of a group mood experience.

## Illustration

A drawing shows a group of three individuals (and a cat) moving boxes in a specific group mood. The scene symbolically illustrates how group members feel, behave and interact in that group mood.

## Descriptive text

The text describes the group mood of a hypothetical group from four aspects:

### 1. Feeling Aspect

It describes how members feel, including their bodily feelings and mental states (e.g. excited, drained).

### 2. Interpersonal Aspect

It describes how group members relate to each other, including how they interact and respond to each other (e.g. supportive, defensive).

### 3. Workflow Aspect

It describes how group members conduct tasks and perceive the workflow (e.g. hasty, smooth).

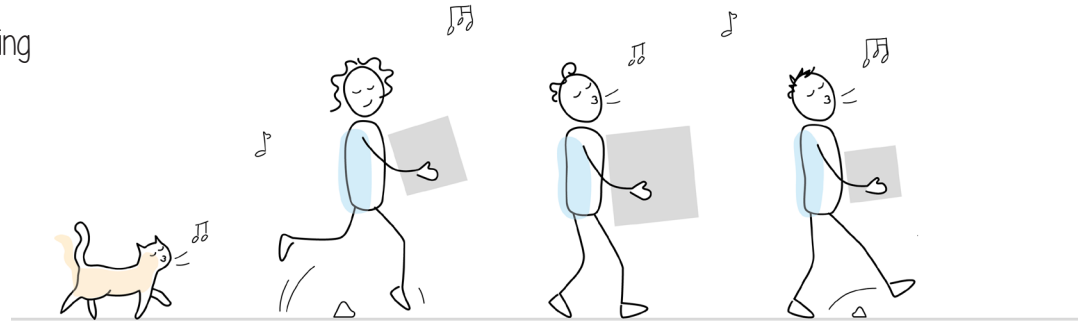
### 4. Motivational Aspect

It describes what the group members are mainly concerned with (e.g. novelty, goal achievement).

# CHILL FLOW

Like a river that keeps flowing

**CLEAR-MINDED,  
CONTENT, PRODUCTIVE,  
CALM, HARMONIOUS,  
COLLABORATIVE, OPEN,  
SMOOTH, EFFORTLESS,  
FOCUSED**



## Feeling

The group members feel clear-minded, content and productive. They are in the flow of doing and performing. The members feel active, yet they spend their energy in a controlled and relaxed manner. Moving forward in a clear direction, they are optimistic about the next steps.

## Interpersonal

The group members collaborate harmoniously. When necessary, they take their time to respond to each other in a tolerant, kind and agreeing way. In moments of struggle, they support each other, and they express their opinions, doubts and worries openly. There is room for small talk. When there is no need for interaction, people may become reserved.

## Workflow

The group members experience a smooth and unconstrained workflow and are able to overcome challenges and mishaps effortlessly. They tend to move in a rhythmic fashion, and they concentrate on the task and enjoy the act of producing.

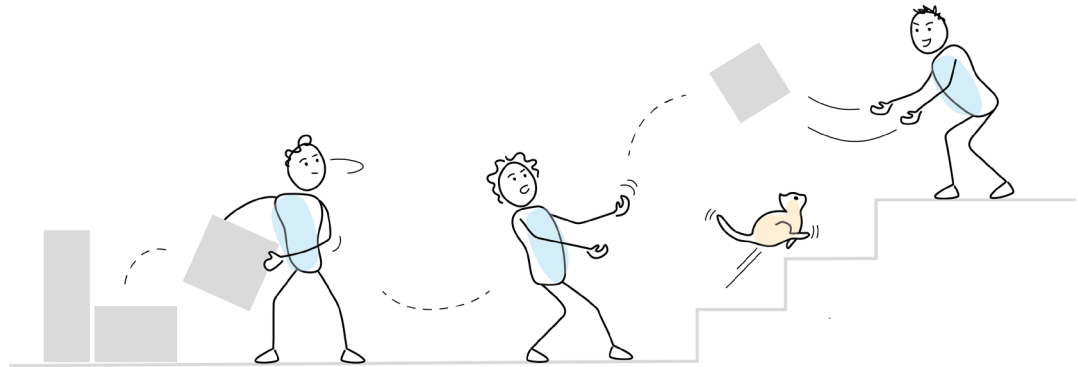
## Motivational

The group members are driven by the feeling of moving forward. They are moved by the activity itself rather than by the premise of achieving a goal.

# FIERY

Ready to take on the world

**CLEAR-MINDED,  
EAGER, ACTIVE,  
DIRECTIVE, TOGETHER,  
ENCOURAGING, HASTY,  
SMOOTH, VIGOROUS,  
SERIOUS**



## Feeling

The group members feel energetic, clear-minded and highly enthusiastic towards reaching the collective goal. With feelings of confidence in overcoming challenges, they are eager to act. They are optimistic and excited about future challenges and opportunities, and there is no room for negative thinking.

## Interpersonal

The group members cooperate efficiently, and they tend to encourage each other by giving motivational speeches, recalling their past accomplishments or portraying future success. For the sake of efficiency, they may communicate in directive ways. It is crucial to act together. Their motto is 'We can do it!'

## Workflow

The group members work in a serious and dedicated manner, using all the resources to the fullest. They face mishaps head-on without wasting time on hesitation or reflection. The hardships never discourage the group, rather stir up vigour.

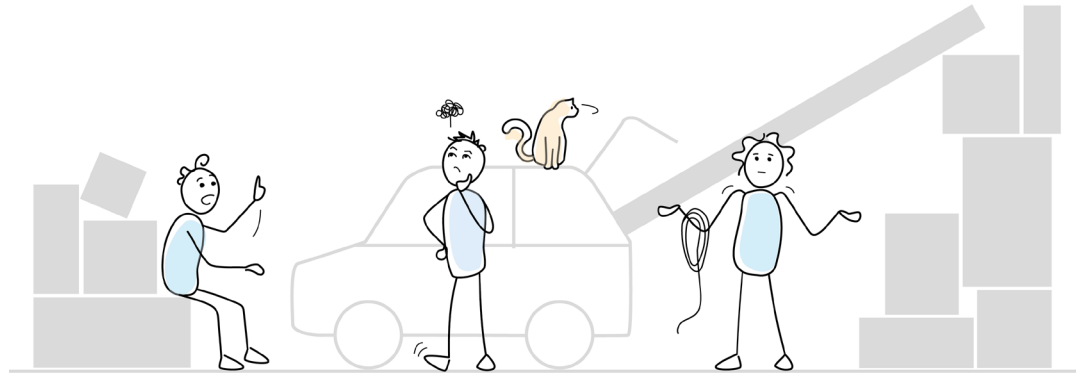
## Motivational

The group members are driven by the premise of success, glory and acknowledgement. No matter what it takes, they strive to achieve good results.

# FUZZY

All at sea

UNCERTAIN, CONFUSED,  
CALM, CONSTRUCTIVE,  
REFLECTIVE, SCEPTICAL,  
RESERVED, CAREFUL,  
MESSY, SERIOUS



## Feeling

The group members feel uncertain, confused and doubtful. They feel stuck with complicated procedures, unclear goals or puzzling options. They become reflective and physically passive. Their blurry vision makes the following steps seem overcomplicated. If this fuzziness takes long, they may start feeling insecure and worried.

## Interpersonal

Despite a lack of consensus, there is a joint constructive effort to make sense of things. Opinion exchange is encouraged, but people approach ideas in a sceptical manner: they tend to question the proposed solutions. Discussions also tend to be paused by contemplative silence.

## Workflow

In search of a clear direction, the group members go through the options carefully. They tend to work in a serious, cautious and sometimes messy way. Jokes or out-of-the-blue ideas are not favoured. People may detach from the group and engage in their own minds to process the puzzle.

## Motivational

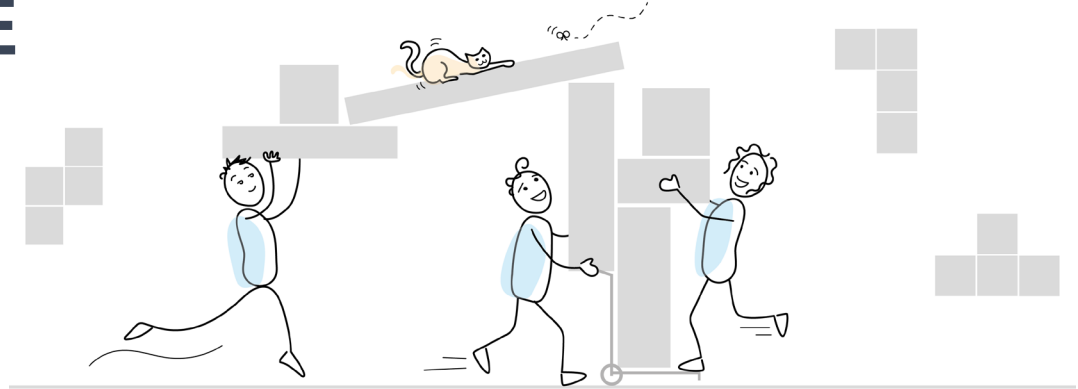
The overall drive is to tackle the issue, achieve clarity and escape the maze. The group members are concerned with finding a collectively agreed-upon way to proceed.



# CREATIVE

Get the juices flowing

ENTHUSIASTIC,  
INSPIRED, FREE, OPEN-  
MINDED, RECEPTIVE,  
ENCOURAGING,  
EXPLORATIVE, LIGHT-  
HEARTED, PLAYFUL



## Feeling

The group members feel enthusiastic and ready to be inspired. They are physically active and mentally energised. They also feel comfortable and free to explore new ideas. Uncertainty is embraced and perceived as a liberating opportunity for discovering novel ideas. They tend to have a highly optimistic and exciting view of the future.

## Interpersonal

The group members are friendly, open-minded and receptive. Everyone feels comfortable expressing their opinions transparently. They listen to each other attentively in a non-judgmental way. In a joint effort to create, they constructively build upon each other's ideas. Acting in unusual ways and proposing unrealistic ideas are tolerated and even encouraged.

## Workflow

The group members work in an explorative and light-hearted manner. They are open to any new and interesting input, and their minds idle freely within the diverging alternatives. Feeling an urge to test ideas, they may perform quick experiments. There is room for humour and playfulness, which can serve as a source of inspiration.

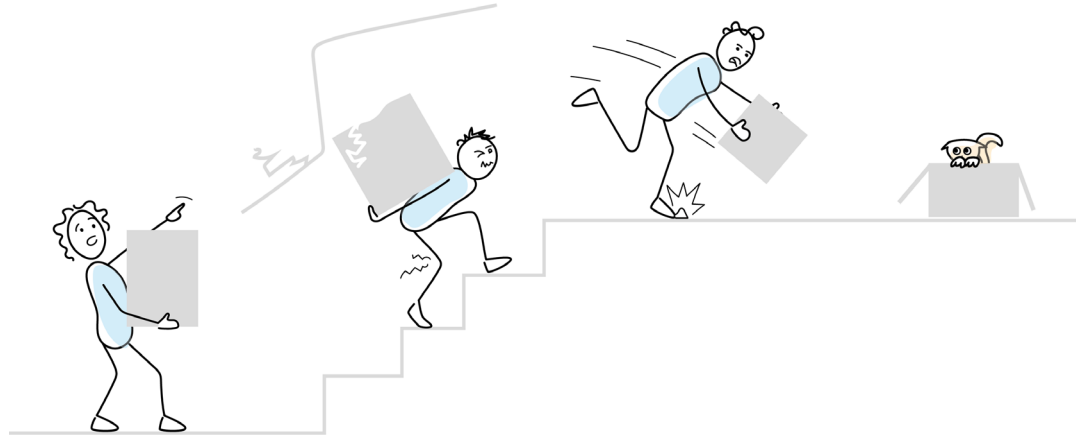
## Motivational

The group members want to go beyond the existing solutions and boundaries. The purpose here is not to find an ultimate solution, but rather to think alternatively.

# TENSE

A bundle of nerves

**STRESSED, NERVOUS,  
FRUSTRATED,  
COLLABORATIVE,  
IMPULSIVE, DEDICATED,  
HASTY, SERIOUS**



## Feeling

The group members feel stressed, nervous and on edge. They are pressured by external events hampering their progress, such as an upcoming deadline, unexpected problems, or overloading mishaps. High levels of struggle can also cause them to feel trapped, and this is usually followed by frustration, pessimism and panic.

## Interpersonal

The group members collaborate to overcome the challenges. In the heat of the struggle, they tend to react to each other in impulsive and directive ways. For them, displaying tolerance or patience or keeping up a positive attitude may become challenging. They may get easily agitated by each other's mistakes.

## Workflow

The group members work in a serious and dedicated manner. The time pressure may lead to a quick and hasty working style. Therefore, they are expected to funnel all their attention, energy and effort into the collective work. Jokes are perceived as inappropriate distractions, and there is no room for new ideas or shifts in the plan.

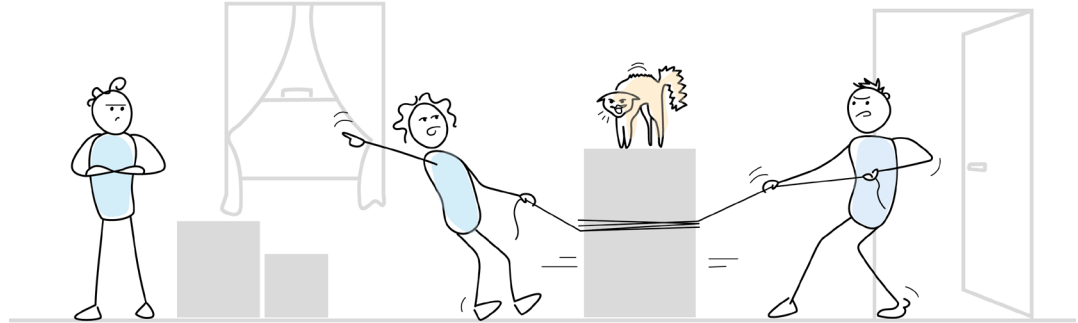
## Motivational

Surviving the challenge is the primary goal. The group members strive to overcome the source of pressure as soon as possible.

# CONFRONTATIONAL

At odds

UNCERTAIN, EAGER,  
FRUSTRATED,  
COMPETITIVE,  
DEFENSIVE, ASSERTIVE,  
IMPATIENT, CRITICAL,  
SERIOUS, INTENSE



## Feeling

The group members face a conflict within the group. Everyone is eager to explain their own perspective and is determined to convince others. They feel active, uncertain and frustrated. Everybody is absorbed in the discussion. If this conflict escalates to a heated discussion, aggression and hostility may follow.

## Interpersonal

The group members interact in a competitive and directive way. The conflicting parties defend their opinions assertively. They respond in sceptical, impatient and discouraging ways. In the heat of the confrontation, opinions may bounce back without being heard. Those whose idea is refused may feel defeated and may detach from the activity for a while.

## Workflow

The group members work in a serious and dedicated manner. They carefully go through the proposed ideas. For them, asking critical questions is a common way to challenge each other's opinions. In this process, they may experience a disrupted, chaotic and intense workflow.

## Motivational

The group members are driven by their need to prove their own perspectives. The overall purpose here is to achieve clarity and bring structure.

# SLACK

## Dragging feet

RELUCTANT, DRAINED,  
FRUSTRATED, CRITICAL,  
RESERVED, SLOW,  
SLUGGISH, EASILY  
DISTRACTED



### Feeling

The group members feel reluctant to start or continue working, although they have to do so. They are physically tired or mentally drained. When the work does not proceed as expected or their effort does not pay off, they may feel weary, frustrated and pessimistic.

### Interpersonal

The group members tend to be reserved: they prefer not to interact with each other unless it is necessary. They tend to be critical of new ideas, especially if they require extra effort. At this point, discussions are considered unnecessary, as they drain energy.

### Workflow

The group members tend to work in a slow and sluggish fashion, as they experience inner struggles or counterforces against proceeding. Any extra responsibility feels unbearable. They may get distracted by external events or personal thoughts.

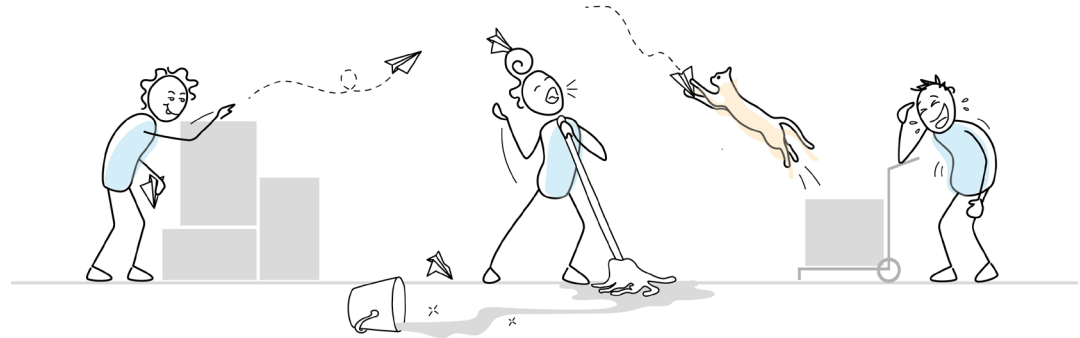
### Motivational

The group members strive to complete the task at hand to conclude the meeting as soon as possible.

# JOLLY

## Joking around

**GIGGLY, RELAXED, SAFE,  
RELUCTANT, FRIENDLY,  
SUPPORTIVE, HUMOROUS,  
PLAYFUL, EASY-GOING,  
EASILY DISTRACTED**



### Feeling

The group members feel light-hearted, relaxed and giggly. They feel reluctant to continue the task at hand. Instead, they are drawn to personal or work-related conversations. They feel safe and comfortable making jokes and disrupting the workflow. Needing a break or feeling relieved or bored after a dedicated work session can lead to a jolly group mood.

### Interpersonal

The group members interact in a friendly, genuine and harmonious way. Everyone feels welcome to build on each other's jokes, tease one another and direct the conversation into new fun ways. They feel open to share personal anecdotes and express weaknesses through humour. For them, jokes serve as a means to uplift each other's mood and reinforce the group bond.

### Workflow

The group members' main focus is no longer on the task at hand. They start taking the task less seriously: they work in a playful, easy-going and sometimes even careless manner. They are easily distracted, since anything can be perceived as a source of a joke or a funny remark.

### Motivational

The group members are driven by their enjoyment of the group activity. The purpose here is to re-energise, wind down and connect on a personal level rather than maintain efficiency.

# Colophon

This booklet was created on the basis of the insights gained from an explorative study that was performed within the scope of a PhD research project. This project aims to develop design knowledge to support designers in creating products and services that can facilitate constructive and desirable group mood experiences. Further details of the study can be found in the article by [Sönmez, Desmet, Romero Herrera \(in press\)](#).

## Graphics and Photos

All the vibe illustrations and icons in this booklet were created by Alev Sönmez. The cover image is a modified version of an original photo owned by Duygu Bostancı.

## Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to Helmer de Witte for his valuable contribution to the conceptualisation of the vibe illustrations. This booklet production was supported by VICI grant number 453-16-009 of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), Division for the Social and Behavioural Sciences, awarded to P.M.A. Desmet.

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Sönmez, A., Desmet, P.M.A., & Romero Herrera, N. (in press). Chill, fiery, slack, and five other vibes: A phenomenological inquiry into group mood. *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*.

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