Group cohesion refers to the sense of togetherness within a group which shares common beliefs and values. These actual or perceived similarities in values attract are what first attract members to the group (Byrne, 1971). The more friendship ties within a group, the more cohesive it will be (Festinger et al., 1950). It has been stated that “There is no such thing as a non-cohesive group; it is a contradiction in terms. If a group exists it is to some extent cohesive” (Silva & Weinberg, 1984). The definition of group cohesiveness has been criticised by Gross & Martin (1954) who believe cohesiveness should be defined in terms of the attraction to the group.

In relation to group performance, a positive effect will be increased if all members are active and engaged participants. Research has generally shown that if a great level of diversity is present within a group then it will be less cohesive, leading to a lower level of performance. However, some have found that group cohesion, diversity and performance are not relatable; for instance Webber and Donohue (2001) found no significant relationship between the three concepts in their meta-analysis. It is believed that a large group size results in dissatisfaction within the group (Porter & Lawler, 1965); therefore it can be assumed that a smaller group would result in greater group performance. An example of diminished performance can be found in the workplace due to job-related tension, as suggested by Seashore (1954) who found there was a negative correlation between group cohesion and job-related tension. This is a useful finding as it can be applied in real life settings – ensuring tension in the workplace is kept to a minimum in order to maintain a high standard of performance from the workforce. Similarly, this finding can also be applied to sports by creating a cohesive team which are all active members and share common values, so that they can perform to their best ability to win more matches.

Despite the much supporting research evidence in this area there has also been some criticism as there is a failure to explain how some groups who actually dislike each other can actually perform to a high standard (Lenk, 1969). A further criticism is that the idea of group cohesion being a result of interpersonal attraction can be regarded as reductionist.