



Stages of Group Development

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Most groups have predictable development, a finding based on four decades of study of group development.

Bruce Tuckman has developed one of the most well-referenced models in which there are five consistent stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Most groups progress through these stages. Each stage builds on the previous stage and prepares the group for performing.

Even with a compelling model, remember a few cautions:

- Some recent studies suggest that groups manifest behaviors from several stages at once.
- Groups may return to earlier stages when some event takes place that disturbs the equilibrium of the group (e.g., new group members, changing of the group's goals or procedures).
- Many groups get stuck in one stage. Research in Fortune 500 companies shows, for example, that only 29 percent of teams reach the performing stage.
- Reaching the performing stage requires constant attention to maintenance (internal group processes) as well as task (the content or production) functions.

Tuckman Stages of Group Development Overview

Stage 1 – **FORMING**: Forming the group; setting ground rules; finding similarities.

Stage 2 – **STORMING**: Dealing with issues of power and control; surfacing differences.

Stage 3 – **NORMING**: Managing group conflict; finding group norms; resurfacing similarities.

Stage 4 – **PERFORMING**: Functioning as an effective group.

Stage 5 – **ADJOURNING**: Finding closure.

When members of a group first meet, typical questions they might have are:

- ❖ Why am I here?
- ❖ Who are all of these other people?
- ❖ What are we supposed to accomplish?
- ❖ What's expected of me?
- ❖ What kinds of behavior are appropriate?



Stage 1 – FORMING

Typical Behaviors:

- The polite stage; focus on getting acquainted and feeling comfortable.
- Conflict is low, suppressed; need for approval high.
- Verbal members tend to dominate.
- Ability to accomplish group tasks and stay focused is low.
- Little listening; high distortion of what is heard.
- Watchful; guarded; personal feelings kept hidden.
- Much giving of/asking for information and data.
- Some inclusion/exclusion issues with “new” and “old” group members.

Implications for team leaders and facilitators:

- Use climate-setting activities to break the ice.
- Help group members identify and prioritize their goals.
- Use brainstorming processes to surface hopes, fears, and expectations of members.
- Identify group-directed procedures and establish ground rules.
- Have everyone identify the roles needed and begin defining roles and responsibilities.
- Help the groups set norms for communicating, resolving conflicts, and presenting ideas.
- Have the group reflect on what worked well in the group and what didn't.

Stage 2 - STORMING

Typical Behaviors:

- Subgroups and individuals attempt to influence ideas, values, and opinions.
- Competition for attention, recognition, and influence.
- People confront each other; interpersonal conflict.
- Polarization; lack of shared vision.
- Members may opt out and/or cliques/alliances form.
- Unsolicited comments; opinions.
- Sense of feeling struck; frustrated.
- Emotional reaction to task or misperceptions about task.
- Process issues discussed outside of meeting.
- Quick fix: address symptoms, skirt problems.
- Power inequities, struggle as members “jockey for position.”

Implications for team leaders and facilitators:

- Try to surface underlying issues and legitimate concerns; encourage the expression of thoughts and feelings.
- Use collaborative interventions (e.g., brainstorming, consensus building) and work on defining roles to support collaborative teamwork.
- Form subtask/problem teams that cut across subgroup boundaries.
- Focus on major issues with the entire group.
- Model reflective listening and coach members on the skills.
- Reinforce respectful listening and communications during group discussion.
- Expect conflict. Encourage group members to express their frustrations and anxieties, and then focus on defining and organizing tasks.



Stage 3 – NORMING

Typical Behaviors:

- Authority/leadership issues discussed and resolved.
- Issues, not people, confronted.
- Cohesion among group members begins; subgroups disappear.
- Members actively listen to each other.
- Appreciation and acceptance of alternative points of view.
- Risky issues/process issues brought up in meetings.
- Ability to remain focused on task at hand.
- Quiet people now contributing more in the group.
- Values and assumptions begin to get discovered and discussed.
- Relevant questions are asked.
- Air of complacency may develop.
- Individuals move beyond blame to responsibility.

Stage 4 – PERFORMING

Typical Behaviors:

- Members try new behaviors and accept new ideas.
- Members relate with honesty, respect, authenticity.
- Problems and difficult issues are dealt with, handled creatively.
- Diversity is affirmed and welcomed.
- Member resourcefulness is utilized to energize each other.
- Decision-making process to be used is understood.
- Frequent review of process issues.
- Clarity on how members experience each other.
- Outside help/resources welcomed.
- Differences bridged with integrity.
- Commitment to work toward common goals.

Implications for team leaders and facilitators:

- Identify the “hidden” norms and invite the group to evaluate them or set new norms.
- Assist the group to develop a positive group identity via teambuilding activities.
- Challenge the boundaries of the group: bring in outsiders and /or newcomers periodically.
- Redefine or reestablish goals by focusing on desired results.
- Coach the group to use problem-solving methods wisely (e.g., nominal group, data dump).
- Use consensus-building interventions and explore areas of actual difference.
- Encourage open communication when members “close up” and appear reluctant to share.
- Invite input when people are reluctant to address issues that might result in conflict.

Implications for team leaders and facilitators:

- Use problem-solving and consensus-building processes to facilitate group work.
- Do nothing, join in and comment on what’s going well.
- Experiment with group structures and explore process improvements.
- Help the group critique itself. Your role as leader becomes less active.
- Arrange appropriate ceremonies/rituals for celebration of accomplishments.
- Use or suggest inclusion activities that give new members a sense of acceptance.



Stage 5 – ADJOURNING

Typical Behaviors:

- The sense of the group is that the work is done.
- May be apprehension over the impending loss of group identity and friendships.
- Cleaning up the group's undone tasks and removing symbols of the group.
- Evaluating the results and producing final reports.
- Saying goodbye.

Implications for team leaders and facilitators:

- Establish closing procedures with the group.
- Help design closing ritual or ceremonies.
- Discuss endings with members and encourage them to talk about how they feel.
- Provide a vehicle for people to say what they appreciate about each other.
- End with a celebration that honors the group and its members.

Adapted by Lisa Hinz, LCE Extension Educator from: *Facilitation Resources: Volume 4. Managing Group Interactions*, (1999) University of Minnesota Extension Service and Hubert H Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. pp. 4.21-4.24. Referenced Source: Terry R. Bacon, *High Impact Facilitation*, International Learning Works, Durango, CO, 1996, originally from: Tuckman, Bruce. (1965). Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological bulletin*, 63, 384-399 Tuckman, B. W. & Jensen, M. A. (1977) Stages of small-group development revisited. *Group Org. Studies* 2:419-27.



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