

Stages of Group Development

Communicating for Results

This module was created by ICA colleagues Karen Snyder and Jim Troxel for use in their consulting practice at Millennia Consulting and in their adjunct teaching roles at DePaul University. Circa 2002.

It is based on a 1977 article by Bruce Tuckman on the Stages of Group Development.

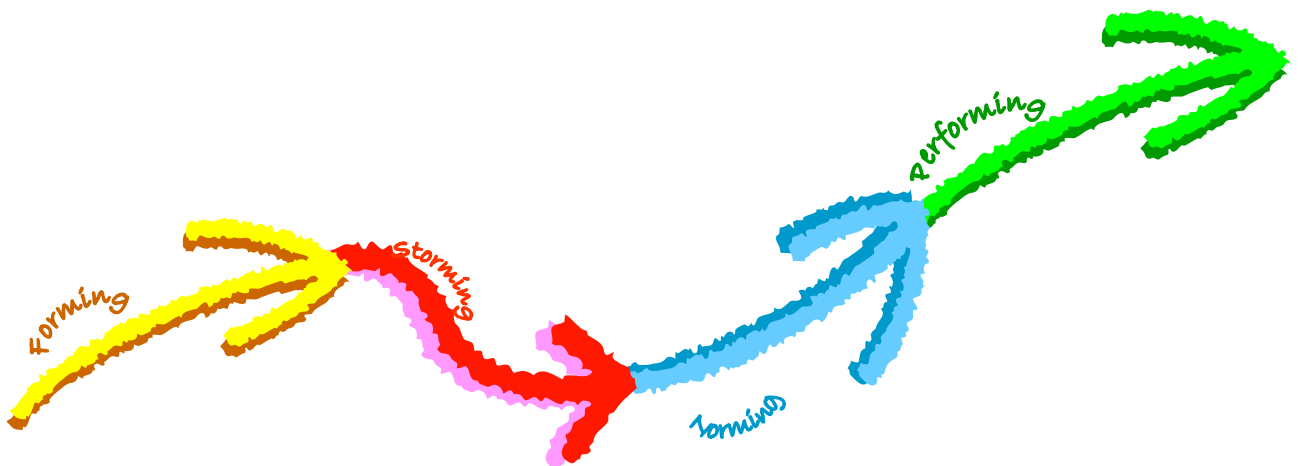
Teams normally go through distinct stages as they develop and pursue their purpose. Each team will spend a different amount of time in each stage. Knowing the stages of group development will help the team when the going gets tough. The use of facilitation methods can also be of significant value.

The four stages of group development are:

1. **Forming**
2. **Storming**
3. **Norming**
4. **Performing**

Learning Objectives

- To understand that it's natural for groups to go through various stages of working together and to begin to identify these different stages.
- To identify strategies for dealing with teams when they are in the various stages of group development.
- To begin to become relaxed when one's team is in a state of storming, because one knows that it's part of the natural development of a team.

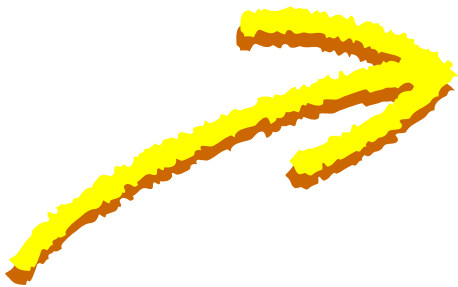


Stage 1: Forming

Dependence

FORMING BEGINS WHEN teams first come together. During this stage they try to decide what to do and cautiously explore the limits of acceptable behavior. Team members may have difficulty staying on track and wander into issues that have nothing to do with their purpose. Members of the group will exhibit a variety of feelings and attitudes, including anxiety. However, the dominant feelings will probably be the excitement, anticipation and optimism of starting something new. The focus of the group during this stage must be to clearly establish a group purpose.

Most team members will have a desire for acceptance by the team and a need to be sure that they team provides a safe opportunity to express one's views. Members will attempt to become oriented to the task as well as to one another.



BEHAVIORS

- Politeness
- Attempts to define needed tasks and methods
- General conversations
- Limited individual disclosure and exploring of relationships
- Attempts to determine acceptable group behavior and how to deal with group problems
- Decisions on what information needs to be gathered
- Lofty, abstract discussions of concepts and issues
- Discussions of symptoms or problems not relevant to the task
- Complaints about the organization and barriers to the task

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- Who's here and why?
- Where do I fit in?
- Will I be accepted?
- What role can I play?

FEELINGS

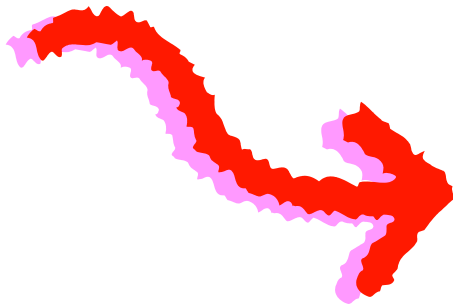
- Excitement, anticipation, optimism mixed with uncertainty
- Pride in being chosen
- Tentative attachment to the team
- Suspicion, fear, and anxiety
- Desire for acceptance

Stage 2: Storming

Conflict

STORMING BEGINS AS frustration sets in. Recognition of the difficulty and/or confusion of the task at hand often causes this. Anxiety sets in as members become concerned over their ability to accomplish their purpose. As different approaches are offered, tension and competition may lead to arguments. Sometimes arguments continue even when members no longer disagree. Group members may view this stage as an inability to work together, and they may try to end the group. But it is important to recognize this stage as a normal part of group development. It signals that members are striving to understand one another.

Individuals will have to bend and mold their feelings, ideas, and attitudes to suit the team organization. There will be an increased desire, therefore, for clarification and commitment to the team's structure. Because of the discomfort generated in this stage, some members may remain completely silent, while others may attempt to dominate.



BEHAVIORS

- Bid for power
- Arguing among members even when they agree on the real issue
- Defensiveness and competition; factions and "choosing sides"
- Competition based on personal agendas
- Questioning the wisdom of those who selected the problem and appointed the other team members
- Establishing unrealistic goals; concern about excessive work
- A perceived "pecking order"; disunity, increased tension, and jealousy

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- Will I be respected?
- What and who do I like, dislike, accept?
- What's in it for me?
- What can I offer?
- What are the rules?

FEELINGS

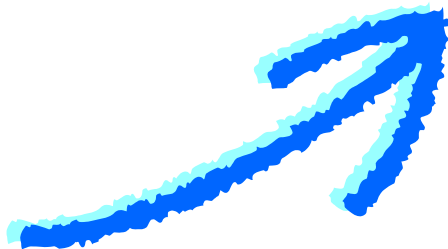
- Resistance to the task and quality improvement approaches
- Sharp fluctuations in attitudes
- Fight or flight
- Quiet apprehensiveness
- Can be hostile

Stage 3: Norming

Cohesion

NORMING OCCURS WHEN THE team begins to “jell”. The individuality of each member becomes appreciated for the ability to contribute to the common goal. Cooperation grows as emotional conflict shrinks. Constructive criticism becomes acceptable. Group cohesion increases as each member begins to share openly and tries to learn how to work together. In this stage the group will establish its own ground rules to define how they will work together.

Frequently team members will be willing to change their ideas or opinions based on the facts discovered during the research portion of the project. Also, some team members may begin to pick up more leadership responsibilities and the general level of trust in both the process and in the team itself increases.



BEHAVIORS

- Cooperation
- An attempt to achieve harmony by avoiding conflict
- More friendliness, confiding in each other, sharing of personal problems
- Willing self-disclosure
- Sense of team cohesion; common spirit and goals
- Recognition and support of team members
- More careful listening
- Establishing and maintaining "norms"

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- How can I help the team?
- What do I need to do to help?
- What's the real issue?
- How will we proceed?

FEELINGS

- A new ability to express criticism constructively
- Communication is more spontaneous and open
- Urgency to identify and evaluate solutions
- Acceptance of membership in the team
- Belief that it seems everything is going to work out

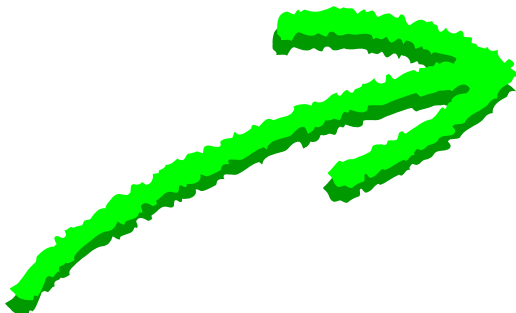
Stage 4: Performing

Interdependence

PERFORMING IS THE STAGE of optimum work productivity. When people truly work together the result is achievement. By now relationships have been settled and people have learned to accept each other. They focus on sharing what they know, supporting each other, and constructive self-change to enhance the performance of the group. A group that reaches the performing stage will achieve significant results together.

But, some teams don't reach it, especially those teams where its members do not discover the importance of the team as a whole.

Those teams that do arrive at Stage 4 have become quite self-assured and confident in their individual and collective capacities. Many teams experience a fierce unity to the team's identity and task. Team problem solving becomes the norm of the group.



BEHAVIORS

- Interdependence
- Collaborative and fun
- Constructive self-change
- Ability to prevent or work through group problems
- Close attachment to the team

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

- How can we do better?

FEELINGS

- Members have insights into personal and group processes, and better understand each other's strengths and weaknesses
- Unselfish enthusiasm for team task and team members
- Satisfaction at the team's progress

What's Next

Adjourning

Adjourning involves the termination of the task and the disengagement from the personal relations. A planned conclusion usually includes a celebration and recognition for participation, and an opportunity for members to make their personal statements.

Transforming

Transforming involves the team taking on a new task or problem to solve. There may be a transition in leadership and team composition. Usually the states of group development begin anew, though the earlier stages may not last as long as the first time.

Group Development Worksheet

What could a team leader do to enable a team when it is ...?	
<i>Forming</i>	<i>Storming</i>
<i>Norming</i>	<i>Performing</i>

References

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Cooke, P., & Widdis, W. (1988). *Guidelines for interventions in groups*. Unpublished manuscript. San Diego, CA: University Associates.

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