

Stages of Group Development

(contributed by Meg Einhorn)

“Many times a day I realize how much of my own outer and inner life is built upon the labours of my fellow men, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received.” *Albert Einstein*

Groups, like all living things, develop over time. The groups may begin as a collection of strangers, you have come together for a common purpose, but before long, uncertainty gives way to conflict, which in turn gives way to cohesion as members become bound to their group by strong social bonds.

a. Have participants form small groups and discuss the following five questions

1. What is **group cohesion** for you? Can you give examples?
2. What are the positive and negative consequences of cohesion?
3. Does **team building** enhance group productivity? Why?
4. What stages have the groups you have known well in your career passed through as they developed over time?
5. In what ways do groups change over time?

b. In what ways do groups change over time?

Study the long-term development of a group to which you currently belong or once belonged. Select a group that has a history that you can document, rather than one that has only recently formed. Classes that meet for a semester before they disband, sports teams, project teams at work, and informal friendship cliques are just a few types of groups you can imagine.

- Begin by describing the group in detail, as it existed when it first formed. Give examples and anecdotal evidence when appropriate.
- Describe any changes that took place in the group over time. Make note of the extent to which the group experienced (a) an orientation stage, (b) conflict, (c) increased cohesion and changes in structure, and (d) a period of high performance or high energy.

c. A model of group development

Look at this description of a well-known model of group development, and decide to what extent it matches the stages in *your* group's development.

The most widely quoted model of group development is the one first suggested by Tuckman in 1965. He surveyed all the studies of small group development he could find and suggested that there was a common pattern: small groups go through the following stages in the following order:

- Orientation: (forming) stage: Members experience tentative interactions, tension, concern over ambiguity, growing interdependence, and attempts to identify the nature of the situation.
- Conflict (storming) stage: Members express dissatisfaction with the group, respond emotionally, criticize one another, and form coalitions.

- Structure (norming) stage: Unity increases, membership stabilizes, members report increased satisfaction, and the group's internal dynamics intensify.
- Task performance (performing) stage: Focus shifts to performance of tasks and goal attainment. Not all groups reach this stage, for even highly cohesive groups are not necessarily productive.
- Dissolution (adjourning) stage: The groups disband. A group's entry into the dissolution stage can be either planned or spontaneous, but even planned dissolution can create problems for members as they reduce their dependence on the group.

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*The Practice of Facilitation:
 Managing Group Process and Solving Problems*
 Harry Webne-Behrman Quorum Books Wesport 1998

d. Music to illustrate the stages of group development

Heron (1999) uses the metaphor of the four seasons to illustrate the stages of group development. Here one can introduce this to our groups by using PowerPoint, or overhead transparencies to illustrate the four seasons, accompanied by the music of Vivaldi's Four Seasons' and a voiceover description of each stage.

THE FOUR SEASONS OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Season	Stage	Explanation
Winter	The stage of defensiveness	Trust is often low, anxiety is high." The ground may be frozen, and the weather stormy."
Spring	The stage of working through defensiveness	Trust is building, anxiety is reducing, and a new culture is being developed. "New life starts to break through the surface crust."
Summer	The stage of authentic behaviour	Trust is high, there is openness to self and others, risk-taking, caring and sharing. "There is an abundance of growth and the sun is high."
Autumn	Closure	Participants gather to examine the fruits of their learning and to transfer it to their own lives. There is a celebration and sadness in farewells. "The fruit is harvested and stored, the harvesters give thanks and go their way."

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 Hogan, C. 2003. *Practical facilitation: a toolkit of techniques*. London. Kogan Page.